

THEMES IN THE INDIAN SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH:
AN HISTORICAL AND A CRITICAL SURVEY

1835-2008

BY

MURLI MELWANI

Melwani's distinction is clearing a trail on a road less travelled in Indian literary studies.

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Dedicated

To

Ganga, Sheela, Nanki, Ratan,
Chand, Poonam, Anita, Mona,
Arvind, Kavita, Arpan, Manish,
Keya, Devan, Navya, Rohan.

Their love sustains me

PREFACE

Critics of Indian Writing in English share the world-wide tendency of regarding the short story as the step-child of literature, although, second to poetry, this literary form is the most suitable recording the variety and nuance of Indian experience. Because it is governed by tradition, Indian life has little place for individual dictates. The result is that whatever experience it yields is predictable, instead of unusual or dramatic. Variation is provided by details within this pattern. There are thus moments of dramatic or lyrical or tragic intensity, rather than a sustained experience, which offer insights into human nature. The short story with its concentration, brevity, sensitivity can better record these moments than can the broader canvas of the novel.

The truth of this argument is borne out by the fact that the Indian novel in English has dealt with only a limited number of themes, such as the national movement for independence, the contrary influences of tradition and Westernization on an individual, and the place of faith in Indian life.

The Indian short story written originally in English has covered a wider area of experience. The settings of the stories have revealed more of this vast country than the novels or plays. The variety of types and characters that appear in the short story are as infinite as the situations and the emotions the stories evoke.

In spite of the advantages it has over other literary forms, in spite of its considerable achievement, the Indian short story in English has been neglected by critics. The aim of this book is to draw attention to this genre.

A number of books of criticism on other genres of Indian writing in English – the novel, poetry, drama – have been written; however, there is little criticism of consequence on the short story. This presents both a problem and an opportunity. C.V.Venugopal's book, *The Indian Short Story in English: a Survey*, published in 1976, has long been out of print.

My book, *Themes in The Indian Short Story in English*, is an introduction to and an historical and critical survey of the Indian short story in English from its beginnings up to 2006. Its development over this length of time divides itself into a number of periods on the basis of common tendencies. The usual approach of the critics - since they critics tend to regard the short story as a side activity of the novelists - has been to discuss a few stories individually. I have tried to look for but not impose a pattern on a short story writer's body of work.

The scope of this book is limited to stories collected and published in book form. Published but uncollected stories even with definite merit have not been dealt with for the simple reason that they are difficult to classify. Retold stories and folk and fairy tales have not been discussed. Nor has the long short story, also known as the novella, conte, the novelette, on the grounds that it forms a different genre. Translated stories have been excluded: they do not represent the direct expression of an Indian sensibility in English. For this reason, Tagore's short stories have not been examined, although his influence, which was considerable, has been noted. Even after these exceptions have been made, a sufficient body exists to merit critical attention.

I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of a number of people. I acknowledge it here. Dr Amaresh Datta helped me to understand the place of short fiction in Indian Literature and thus gave me a sense of perspective about this genre. He was the Head of the English department, Guwahati University at that time; later, he was deservedly chosen to serve the prestigious Sahitya Akademi. Dr Gobinda Prasad Sarma, also of Guwahati University, made it possible for me to gain access to material I would have had difficulty in obtaining. The critic, short story writer and novelist, H.E.Bates instilled in me a love for the short story which will never die.

I take this occasion to thank Dr. Suroopa Mukherjee, author and Reader, English Department, Delhi University for the Foreword.

I wish to thank Dr. Chris Parr and Mr. Ronald Ternosky, both of Dallas, for their valuable suggestions.

My thanks go to Veda Aggarwal, a designer and a musician in Pune, India, for the layout and for her technical help.

I am grateful for the Grace of my Master, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

Reading the stories I have discussed in my book gave me great joy. This joy will multiply manifold if my book can convince the reader to turn to the stories themselves.

FOREWORD

Dr. Murli Melwani's *Themes in The Indian Short Story in English* is a historical overview of what he describes as the "step child of literature", the Indian short story in English. A short story can be philosophical, political, lyrical and subversive. What Melwani suggests is striking; as a literary form it is especially suitable to deal with the wide range of Indian experiences, so that thematically it is more expansive and faithful to the nuances of a multicultural, diverse nation like India than the Indian novel in English.

At a time when the Indian novel in English is being noticed in the literary scenario, winning both awards and accolades, this seems a timely critical interjection. Melwani makes it very clear that he is not discussing individual stories, so that each chapter is period based and gives us brief pen portrait of authors and their works, ranging from established writers, to lesser known names, to those whom we discover for the first time.

To that extent there is nothing predictable in the choice of works and the way they have been placed in the historical, socio-political context. The analysis never palls because each author, and the list is comprehensive and wide ranging, is accompanied by sharp, insightful comments on different aspects of writing and reading. Normally this sort of capsule presentation of a particular period, covering a decade, can give a sense of sampling rather than providing an in-depth literary analysis; it is to Melwani's credit that he is both astute and incisive in his commentary, however brief they might be.

At times why he includes a writer can be a trifle whimsical, but his individual author analysis is rarely sketchy. Thus we get an interesting analysis of why Melwani

feels Ruth Pawar Jhabvala is a better short story writer than a novelist. Sometimes he provides startling juxtapositions such as Jhabvala's use of satire compared to Khushwant Singh's satirical writing.

We also get to know about Keki Daruwala's short stories, a lesser known aspect of the poet. The space that is given to authors can vary. So Anita Desai gets as much space as Hamdi Bey or Jug Suraiya. Some authors are barely mentioned in a catalogue style, which can be frustrating and can take away from the flow of the argument. At times one gets the sense that key themes such as the politics of Indian writing in English is given too little space, though here again the analysis is sharp and insightful.

Melwani's contention is that the question of Indian writing in English is asked 2 decades later, so that when Ruskin Bond and Bunny Rueben are writing short stories in English the question of authenticity is no longer a key issue. However it is in the postmodern tales that Melwani becomes a little too predictable, and one begins to feel the absence of a more contemporary treatment of modern literature in relation to complex times.

In the final analysis it would seem that the step motherly treatment given to short stories is largely because key writers, mostly novelists and poets, merely experiment with short stories so that it remains a side activity. A pity that a neglected literary form with enormous potential, which Melwani suggests in a way that is often tantalizing and intriguing, can only arouse lukewarm interest in the reader. The portrait gallery suggests mediocrity rather than real genius when the short story is regarded as a side activity.

This aspect has been brought into the argument but only with reference to individual writing rather than as a matter of critical contention. However Melwani successfully draws our attention to works that are less known, and to authors whom we tend to neglect. I for one would be tempted to pick up the works of Attia Hosain and Padma Hejmadi.

Dr Suroopa Mukherjee

Dr Suroopa Mukherjee is the author of *Across the Mystic Shore* (novel), *Tale of the Forest*, *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts, and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster* (Palgrave Studies in Oral History).

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INTRODUCTION

Story telling is as old as mankind, and short fiction, in its various forms, as parable, fable, allegory and homily, has always been a popular form of entertainment. The folktale, with its lucidity, simplicity and concern with one briefly defined theme, is certainly the ancestor of the modern short story.

Story-telling flourished in ancient India. The earliest of the Jataka tales date, on the evidence of the carvings on the Bharhut stupa, from the third century B.C. These tales deal with episodes from the previous births of the Buddha; they tell how the Bodhisattva, as prince or gardener, teacher or trader, as elephant or bird, brought peace and understanding among men. Although the aim is didactic, the tales subtly combine atmosphere, humour and purpose with the utmost simplicity. The Panchatantra stories, in their present form, range from the second to the fourth century A.D. These stories offer practical wisdom: the secret of success lies in hard work combined with wit and resourcefulness. This message is conveyed by the device of animals behaving like human beings. The long, complicated and digressive narratives of the *Kadambari* and *Dashakumaracharita* (The Adventures of Ten Princes) belong respectively to the early and late seventh century. The *Katha-sarita-sagara*, the longest and largest collection of stories in the world, twice as long as *The Iliad* and the *Odyessy* put together, was set down in the tenth or eleventh century. It shows men and women playing a wide variety of roles in the drama of life, a drama in which the magical, the supernatural and the normal are not differentiated.

These stories travelled to what is now known as the Middle East, and thence Europe, where they circulated in different versions. In the Middle Ages, Boccaccio and Chaucer often borrowed the central idea of their narratives from one of these versions. A few Elizabethan authors, like Peele and Greene, wrote short fiction in heavy, ornate prose. In seventeenth and eighteenth century England, short fiction was

popular in the form of the character sketch. When the novel was at the height of its popularity, a short story was understood as a condensed novel or as the précis of one. The form as we know it today, as a consciously fashioned work, is a product of modern times.

The modern concept of the short story developed towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. One probable reason is that the short story could gain acceptance only after the novel had established itself as a serious form of literature, and this it did in the eighteenth century. A more likely reason is the demand for short fiction created by the rapid growth of newspapers and periodicals in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. With increased demand went the precondition of a better, more compact story. The result: not only were better stories written, but the art of short story writing became a subject of critical study.

*

It is not possible to single out a particular country or writer as being the originator of the short story. The credit is shared by a group of writers in four different countries, who published their work within a few years of each other, between 1812 and 1830. In Germany, E.T.W. Hoffman followed, with three collections, on the heels of the Grimm brothers, who issued their volumes of fairy tales between 1812 and 1815. The American author, Irving, brought out his *Sketch Book* in 1820, while resident in England. He reissued the book a number of times during the decade. By 1831, N.V. Gogol in Russia had begun his career as a short story writer. In France, Merimee, Balzac and Gautier had started work before that date.

Gogol turned his back on romanticism and focused his attention with realism, on the lives of common people. Edgar Allan Poe, in America, was the first writer to insist that the short story must aim at a predetermined effect; anything that did not contribute to this effect must be excluded. Poe's theory is important as a landmark,

first, because it recognizes that artistic design is essential to the short story, and, second, because it indicates that the form had reached maturity: as early as 1842 someone could formulate principles that governed or should govern it. Merimee, a French writer, is important for the objectivity of his approach: “the thing (itself) should stand and speak before the reader.” The Russian, Ivan Turgenev, in *A Sportsman's Sketches* was the first short story writer to resort to the oblique method of narration, which suggests more than it states, and demands painstaking artistry. Ambrose Bierce in America anticipated, with his psychological studies, the practice of short story writers interpreting character by means of apparently casual incidents.

After Bierce, Stephen Crane by his example of visual writing proved that a simple clear picture is worth a thousand words. The short story especially, limited as it is in space, must be a picture and words in it must create the illusion of sense-impression, to appeal to all the senses.

Over in France, Guy de Maupassant, with his insistence on closely-coordinated structure, became, and continues to remain, one of the most healthy influences on the short story. The American, O. Henry, dispensed with Maupassant's balanced lead-up and popularized the arresting, clipped opening and the story of the double reversal of the situation, the brisk style and the surprise ending. Anton Chekov, the Russian master, cut the beginning and the end off stories and obliquely narrated casually arranged incidents. He demonstrated how a story could be made significant by what was left out as by what was put in. Rejecting the stereotyped story based on a set pattern, he ushered in a movement towards a more natural, realistic and individual method of story writing. This approach was to be adopted by writers like A.E. Coppard, Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter and others.

H.G. Wells, in England, gave the short story the function of a folktale: he used it as a vehicle for scientific parables and mystic experience.

During the early years of the twentieth century fresh influences come from Ireland. In *Dubliners*, James Joyce used word-music to convey a pictorial and emotional effect. Liam O'Flaherty enlarged the scope of the short story by dealing with unusual subjects like the birth of a lamb or the death of a cow

The manner in which I have traced the development of the short story form differs from the usual practice of commentators on the short story. Their approach has been to trace the growth of the short story in individual countries, in Russia, America and France, and conclude that the pattern of growth was similar in each country. This approach is valid as far as it goes. But a closer historical study reveals that the growth was not only parallel but also consecutive, cutting across international boundaries. The influence of a particular writer was felt not only in his country but also in others. What was significant in his contribution helped to develop and refine the form.

This is the tradition the Indian short story writer in English has consciously accepted, a form refined in the West. What made him turn his back on his own, rich heritage of story telling and seek inspiration in a Western form? The answers are simple.

The traditional form of story-telling is too rigid for purposes of exploring and expressing the experience of everyday Indian life. Right from the days of the Jataka tales to Somadeva's *Katha-sarita-sagara*, the story teller's practice had been to enlarge and complicate the theme, not merely by combining a number of fables to form a book but to interweave the fables so that the whole tale could appear a unity. "This involved making the characters in the fables support their maxims by allusions to other fables which they necessarily are asked to tell, with the result that in a fable others are normally inserted while the process may be carried so far as to include in such an inserted fable another inserted fable." (A.B.Keith) The metaphor of a wheel

revolving within a wheel revolving within another aptly conveys the involved nature of this form of story telling.

The format of the chain tale is inadequate for the twentieth century Indian writer for a number of reasons. It is shapeless, digressive and diffuse both for the modern writer as well as the reader, both of whom are pressed for time. If at all, it may be used only for the tale of adventure. It is too inflexible for psychological probing, since it does not allow character to develop.

The characters the chain-tale dealt with were kings and princes, brahmins and sadhus, fairies and heavenly beings. The concern of the modern short story is not only the common man, but the man of common clay. The chain-tale often invested its exalted personages with symbolism. The modern short story, even when it resorts to symbolism, uses men of common clay as symbols, and finds them adequate for its symbolical purposes.

The events described by the older tale were fantastic; the transition from the supernatural to the normal was swift; events were ordained by heaven and solved by breath-taking coincidences.

The modern short story deals with man's humdrum existence; it accepts the dictum that events flow from character and character influences events.

Does this mean that the Indian short story writer in English has nothing to learn from the traditional tale? As examples of the story teller's skill, the tales will repay study. He can learn something about narrative and technical polish. He can learn much about Indian attitudes, traits, outlook and beliefs. This historical and traditional knowledge will supplement and enrich what he learns from his experience of life in present-day India. The old stories are saturated with the spirit of religion and piety; some stories reveal a secular approach; some, a blend of both. Some stories reveal fancy; others realism. Some are profound; others blend buffoonery with it. The stories

also reveal certain perennial types: the greedy priest, the garrulous barber, the shrewd bania. In short, the traditional stories are a multi-dimensional mirror which the Indian short story writer in English can hold up to present-day Indian life.

Writers like Mulk Raj Anand have openly acknowledged their debt to the traditional stories. Others, like R.K. Narayan, have incorporated folk elements in their stories in so far as these form a part of the lives of their rural or orthodox characters. Yet others, like Sudhin Ghose, have used them as prototypes for their allegories on modern life. Raja Rao has found in them inspiration for his experiments with the short story form.

In the present-day Indian context, the short story enjoys a few advantages over the novel. Indian life, whether traditional, transitional or modern, has not been, and is not a sustained experience. It is characterized by lyrical moments. The novel is less suited to record these than the short story. Again, the intellectual is isolated from the life of the masses. The short story can better record his sense of isolation and unrelatedness, just as it can convey the frustrations of the masses. Then again, “the heterogeneous nature” of his audience makes it difficult for the Indian novelist in English to take for granted certain basic assumptions open to the regional writer by virtue of his common culture and language. The regional writer can suggest much “by the mere mention of a detail of dress or manner and even linguistic peculiarities.” Instead, the Indian novelist in English “has constantly to explain rather than imply, thereby doubling his task.” The degree of sophistication in a short story depends on the extent to which it relies on such suggestion for its effects. The very nature of the short story excludes the necessity of explanation. What, according to Meenakshi Mukherjee, is a shortcoming in the Indian novel in English turns into an advantage in the Indian short story in English.

Finally, having accepted the Western form, has the Indian short story writer in English contributed anything of value to it? Has his work made the form more flexible as, say, Chekov's did? Raja Rao is the only Indian writer to experiment with form. He has tried to blend the traditional tale with the modern short story with one or two interesting results. The other writers have been content to accept the Western form in all its variety and to use it to express Indian life and personality. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this, since not every writer can be an innovator, and since any particular form is a tool by means of which a writer expresses himself. After all, there are less drastic ways of learning to fly than taking an aero plane to pieces. What the Indian short story writers in English have had to say in this form is important and substantial enough to be the subject of specific examination, study and comment.

SECTION I

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

The English language followed the British to India. Starting as a tool for administrative convenience, it became the medium of instruction in schools. Contrary to the cliché, it was not imposed on India; prominent Indians, like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, pleaded for its introduction at a time when the British wished to encourage Oriental studies. The study of English literature stimulated a number of vernacular literatures like Bengali, Tamil and Marathi. Before long Indians turned to it for creative expression. By the first third of the nineteenth century a couple of volumes of poetry and a play had been published in English.

Controversy surrounds the first work of Indian fiction in English. “A Journal of Forty Eight Hours of the Year 1945” by Kylash Chunder Dutt was published in D.L.Richardson’s *Calcutta Literary Gazette* dated 6th June 1835.

Pallab Sen Gupta, who resurrected the work, contends that this piece of fiction is a short story. If Sen Gupta were right, we could claim that the first short story in English was written as early as 1835. The question is: is “Forty Eight Hours” a short story?

“Forty Eight Hours” is a fantasy which describes a rebellion of Bengalis, led by a person called Bhuban Mohan, against the British. The rebellion is speedily put down. Dr. Amalendu Bose rightly describes it as a novel, since its technique suggests a novel and not a short story.

Similar criticism applies to another short work on the theme of an armed uprising by Indians, Soshee Chunder Dutt’s *The Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century*.

In both these short novels, fantasy is a veil for political protest. At a time when

verse rather than prose attracted more Indians, political protest was one of the three most dominant themes of the novels written till the first decade of the twentieth century. The other two themes were social reform and historical romance. Intent overtakes art in these novels, and the propagandist or romantic motive is predominant. Most of the novels stress the documentary aspect of their subject matter, and focus attention on the customs and traditions of Indian life. This is also the intention of writers who retell folk tales or mythological stories, or even attempt a picture of contemporary life.

To a collection of short stories, published as early as 1901, belongs the distinction of subduing didactic aim to literary purpose. The collection is Cornelia Sorabji's *Love and Life Behind the Purdah*. Cornelia Sorabji was one of the first women graduates of an Indian university. She studied law at Oxford and practiced at the bar in Calcutta. As a social worker she championed the cause of women's education and emancipation. "Love and Life Behind the Purdah", a collection of eleven stories, marks a departure from prevailing literary practice. Although there can be little doubt as to why Cornelia Sorabji wrote these stories, her motives do not intrude on the artistry of the stories.

Cornelia Sorabji is sensitive to incident and character. She can evoke feelings in a reader ranging from pathos to humour. She builds her stories round a love interest. The stories in "Love and Life" deal with various aspects of Indian womanhood. Cornelia Sorabji shows Indian women striving for Western education, as Sita does in "The Pestilence at Noonday", or the lady-doctor in "Love and Death". Problem-stricken women in the zenana or behind the purdah are portrayed in stories entitled "Love and Life" and "Behind the Purdah". The curse of suttee is high-lighted in "Living Sacrifice", in which a girl-widow, reluctant to immolate herself, has to submit to the dictates of custom. All the stories indict the institution of child marriage.

Even the aspirants for Western education have to resign themselves to tradition. Suffering and death are the only form of feeble protest women can make in Indian society.

Cornelia Sorabji's short stories unfortunately exerted no influence. Extra-literary considerations continue to dominate the work of other writers. Even a collection of detective stories, S.B. Banerjea's *The Adventures of Mrs Russel* (1909), is as concerned with creating a sense of mystery as focusing attention on Indian life and manners.

The Adventures of Mrs Russel is supposed to be a novel in five chapters, but each chapter deals with a separate episode which is complete in itself. The only link between the chapters is the person of the detective, Mrs Russel. We are justified in classifying this book as a collection of short stories rather than as a novel.

Mrs Russel comes to India at the invitation of Sir John Castlemaine of Bombay. He wants her to save his life from the men who are threatening him with anonymous letters and who have already made two attempts on it. After Mrs Russel traces the miscreants, she stays on in India to solve other mysteries.

All the characters in the stories are English, including the narrator, who is the brother of the detective. Yet Mrs Russel knows Indian manners, customs, religions and traditions like one born to them. She uses her encyclopedic knowledge to solve her problems. The author conveniently uses this device to display Indian life to westerners. Here is an example of Mrs Russel's methods of deduction: "A Brahmin," the commissioner suggested.

'Wrong, sir. He was a chettri. How? Well, a Brahmin's holy thread is spun out of cotton, while that of a chettri from silk or flax. Now these threads are made out of the latter material. Therefore we conclude that the man is a chettri. From the body we can easily deduce that the deceased is a Hindustani, or a 'kho ta' as the Bengalis

say. ‘”(The Unclaimed Box)”

Mrs. Russel is unconvincing as a character. Apart from her familiarity with all aspects of Indian life, she is a person of super-human ability. She has a very acute senses and sharp reflexes. She can, for example, diagnose a disease by simply looking at a corpse. In “Sati’s Revenge” she displays uncanny anticipation and skill in killing a cobra hurled at Sir John Castlemane. .(A female ancestor of James Bond?) Mrs Russel has the added gift of being omniscient. She solves cases with an ease that has the unfortunate effect of dissipating whatever little suspense may have been created.

S.B. Banerjea’s *Tales of Bengal* (1910), a collection of seventeen stories, is written with the intention of throwing light on village life in Bengal. This collection cannot be classed as an original work because the writing had to be revised by its editor, Francis Henry Skrine, who says in the Introduction that “Mr. Banerjea’s tales were written for this own countrymen and needed extensive revision in order to render them intelligible to Western readers. I have preserved the author’s spirit and phraseology; and venture to hope that this little book will shed some light on the problem of Indian Administration.”. Even the editor has a didactic purpose!

A purpose similar to Banerjea’s informs Dwijendra Nath Neogi’s *True Tales of Indian Life* (1917), a collection of stories. Each story eulogizes a particular trait of the Indian character. The author has taken care to represent as many Indian communities as possible. The Mahrattas, for example come in for praise in Story No 1 (“Consideration for Others”).

These stories are not of the author’s invention. They are stories about real men which have been handed down from generation to generation. Neogi describes them as tales, but they are closer to the short story than the tale, even though they lack the finish of a short story. A few, however, like “Tata the Parsee” hardly rise above the level of biographical sketches.

True Tales was prescribed for higher classes in English High Schools in Bengal. The journal, *The Madras Christian*, commented, “The stories are well written and worth Educational Review” this book supplies a ‘felt need’ and we would there were many more of its kind”.

The plan of Neogi’s succeeding collection, *Anecdotes of Indian Life* (1920) is similar to that of *True Tales*.

Dhan Gopal Mukerji’s *Jungle Beasts And Men* (1923) is sometimes regarded as a collection of short stories. The book does not have a coherent plot. Each chapter is a story or tale held together by the two boy characters, the narrator and his friend Radjah. The two friends wish to see shrines, cities and mountains. During the journey to the Himalayas, they hear stories about, and at different times encounter snakes, tigers and elephants. Magic and adventure pervade the book. When the two boys reach the Himalayas, they see various new species of birds and beasts. We are forced to conclude that *Jungle Beasts and Men* should be regarded as a picaresque novel and not a collection of short stories.

A.S. Panchpakesa Ayyar first published his *Indian After Dinner Stories* in 1925. This a collection of very short tales, some no longer than one paragraph. These pieces are not short stories in the true sense of the word. They are rather parables and homilies. Each story conveys a moral. The characters are as various as the parables: Europeans rub shoulders with ancient Indian sages and priests, witches and sannyasis with psychologists and swaraj-loving ladies.

The last story in the collection, “The High Mountains and the Sea” is fairly typical. A man asked a sage, “Why is it that few are greed about God and the other world whereas many agree about trade and theft.” The sage replied that this was so for the same reason that many meet on the seashore and few on the mountain tops. Few care to climb the Himalayas and look at the world from the correct perspective, while all

can walk down to the seashore and see the common views and repeat one another's opinion.

The twelve stories in Ayyar's *Sense in Sex and Other Stories of Indian Women* (1929) are not as simple or brief as those in the earlier collection. They resemble neither parables nor modern short stories. Most lack the basic unity of a short story. All the stories display sympathy for the lot of the Indian woman. The author's purpose is to draw attention to social ills. "Slaves of Custom," for instance, describes the situation which leads a poor man to give away his young daughter in marriage to a sickly old man because he does not have the money to attract a young son-in-law. The tragedy of the girl and the sorrow of the parents are presented with poignancy. The author reacts with sorrow rather than anger at the inability of Indian women to rebel against custom.

Similarly, the stories in *The Finger of Destiny and Other Stories* (1932) are built round social problems. The 130 tales in *Gripping Tales of Ind* (1948) are modelled on those in *After Dinner Stories* with the difference that they are longer.

Ayyar's characters never come alive for the simple reason that they are conceived as illustrations to the author's commentary. On the credit side, Ayyar does have a flair for natural, mildly amusing dialogue, for neat description and simple flowing English.

Another writer of the time who practiced the short story skillfully was Shankar Ram. *The Children of the Kavery* (1927) and *Creatures All* (1931), later published together as *The Ways of Men* (1966), were popular at the time of their first publication. The stories give an authentic picture of rural life in South India. Shankar Ram's subject is the incident of every day life. He writes lucid, unpretentious English. He has a gift for conveying the pathetic or humorous nuance. But a tendency to force events to a moralistic conclusion, as in "The Raja's Last Hunt", mars his good work. In this story a Raja with his men follows and corners a tiger that has lifted a calf from

the village. The tiger bravely faces the men, but he does not fight, even though he knows that he will be killed if he does not make a speedy escape. On entering the cava, after the tiger's death, the Raja finds two motherless cubs. Obviously the tiger had killed the calf in order to feed its young. The Raja vows never to hunt a tiger again.

C.T. Ramabhai provides a sharp contrast to Shankar Ram in both skill and execution. Where the latter merely states, Ramabhai hammers home the point. Perhaps her age may be advanced as an excuse for her literary immaturity; she was 21 when she published *Victory of Faith and Stories* (1935). This collection contains four stories and eight poems. The title story is representative of her writing.

The purpose of this story is to show how complete surrender to God's will is necessary for man's salvation. Sudanath's ailing wife, declared a hopeless case by doctors, convinces her husband into believing unquestioningly in God's will. She gets well when her husband's surrender is complete.

Ramabhai's work, not particularly artistic in itself, is of some significance in the history of the Indian short story in English. Ramabhai may be said to be the first short story writer in English to use Indian English. This quotation, for instance, is almost a transcription of how an Indian would speak:

"Sudanath, who was the only son of a rich man, spent money like water on doctors and medicines in the hope of his dear wife's recovery."

" 'Please don't grieve so' said Swarna again, 'for what must happen does happen inspite of ourselves' "

Grammatically the language is correct, but the voice behind these words has individual inflexions, and the accent they suggest is vastly different from that heard over the BBC or VOA. Unfortunately, Ramabhai did not sustain her experiment, conscious or unconscious. She merely reflects the stylistic temper of the times. It was left to writers of greater talent such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, and Raja Rao

to carry out in the succeeding decade and a half sustained experiments with the English language.

SECTION II: THE FIRST FLOWERING: 1935-1945

Background

Most of the short stories written between 1900 and 1935 are marked by, as we have seen, a strong note of didacticism in intent and execution. To what may this be attributed? The first and perhaps the most important reason is the influence on the reader of traditional Indian literature. The second reason becomes apparent when we consider, as we must, the influences upon the writer, especially those of the regional literatures, popular entertainment and the cinema. Dorothy Spenser advances two other highly convincing arguments in this connection. She says that “in the early years at any rate Indian authors were influenced by Victorian moralistic works.” Her second reason takes into account the “general spirit of the times: an influential section of the population had come, largely as a result of contact with the West, to be sharply critical of many Indian institutions, to press in various ways the need for reform; new and revolutionary ideas could be presented in palatable form in the novels and short stories.”

The example and influence of Tagore should have countered these influences and rendered the short story less didactic. It is surprising that till 1935 the Indian short story in English showed little awareness of the work of Tagore, who gave a distinct character to the Indian short story. “He absorbed the Western spirit and naturalized it into Indian literature.”

Tagore took the short story back to its earlier simplicity. He made it a thing of suggestion and significance, not of statement. He used it not as an instrument for working out artificial social and political dilemmas but as a record of everyday experience. He brought it closer to realism. His subject matter is as far-reaching as the forms he practiced. How courageous his action was becomes clear when we realize that the vogue was Kipling’s elaborately worked out short stories.

Fortunately, Tagore's influence on the short story writers who published their work during the next fifteen years was considerable. It is difficult to pinpoint this influence; it was wide and all-persuasive. Among the work of well-known writers, R.K.Narayan's stories give the unmistakable indication that their author had studied Tagore with profit.

Tagore's influence combined with another wide-ranging factor to make this the richest period in the history of the Indian short story in English.

This factor was the stimulus that Gandhism provided to literary activity. The stirring political and social events of the time – the civil disobedience movements, the Salt Satyagrahas, the Round Table Conferences, measures for the upliftment of the Harijans, the growth of socialism of various hues – gave writers new subjects, themes and characters. Gandhi's example, of his life and of his writings, taught the writer to choose simplicity and clarity in preference to ornateness in approach and language. The new insights into Indian life and a more direct medium of expression fostered the growth of the Indian short story in English. What provided the writer with opportunities of expression, against this background, was, as K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar rightly points out, the proliferation of newspapers and magazines.

The Indian nationalist movement was not only a political, social and ideological movement, but also an emotional experience. It jolted Indians into adopting radically changed attitudes to life. The mighty experience called for involvement. In some people this involvement took the form of political and social reform. In others, perhaps the more creative ones, it took the form of literary activity. Mulk Raj Anand was one such person.

Section II

CHAPTER 1

MULK RAJ ANAND

Mulk Raj Anand was perhaps the first Indian short story writer in English to provide a healthy corrective to the picture of the “natives” which writers like Kipling had painted for their countrymen. Writing in 1941, H.E. Bates noted this fact. He wrote, “for now, fifty years after Kipling’s autocratic heyday, the emancipated native writers of India are at last beginning to speak of their own country. The voice which Kipling chose not to hear is now speaking for itself with a quality of realistic and poetic truth.”

It is unfortunate that Anand’s short stories have been overshadowed by his other writing. Anand’s effort in the shorter form is significant, both in quality and volume. He has published over a hundred short stories in seven volumes between 1934 and 1973. Some short fiction remains to be published. Anand himself has taken the art of the short story seriously, as his pronouncements at various places indicate. One such pronouncement is “In fact, the folk tale form has seemed to me the most perfect form of the short story. I took in the individual and group psychology of the European conte and tried to synthesize the two styles. And thus I sought to create a new kind of fable which extends the old Indian story form into a new age.”.. The fact that there are a number of valid approaches to his short stories is suggestive of the vitality of his work in this genre.

One extreme is represented by the American scholar, Marlene Fisher, who suggests that a single interpretation holds good for all his stories. According to her, all the short stories of Anand explore “lostness, internal and external, and represent a search for meaning along this path.” ‘The Lost Child’ is a rubric for a great many of the short stories of Mulk Raj Anand. Whether concentrating on the literal lostness of a

child at a fair or on a cynical, on a lust-ridden priest who is lost to himself and to his God or on a young daughter-in-law who is desolately alone in the midst of her new husband's family, Anand treats this aspect of the human condition with an astonishing variety and control of form and tone."

Unfortunately, such an approach suggests the strait-jacket. It denies variety to Anand's work, it suggests a writer of limited attainments, and it forces a critic into defensive and far-fetched analysis (as it does Marlene Fisher in her interpretation of "The Cobbler and the Machine")

A critic can go to the other extreme, become oblivious of an over-all pattern and seek "insights into the nature of human experience " by analyzing a few, usually the better known stories. Such an approach throws up a fragmented view.

Of course, we can become so obsessed with the over-all pattern that we can choose to study the short stories in the context of Anand's entire work, particularly his novels. Such an approach would be comparative rather than analytical. The emphasis would then be on the themes, motifs, characterization, language, and other features in common between the various literary forms Anand has chosen to practise.

Related to such an approach is the one which seeks to trace Anand's development as a short story writer by studying his stories in a chronological order. One may notice that, superficially, Anand's work leads from stark naturalism to ironical and symbolical presentation. Superficially, because in Anand's case there can be no water-tight compartments. We cannot state with scientific precision when realism ends and symbolism begins, because the one has not ended and the other is always present. Indeed, the characteristics of Anand the short story writer are the same, but for heightened compassion, in his first collection as in his last.

In Anand there is also the danger of missing the wood for the trees and concentrating on a prominent feature of his short stories. One such feature is the

picture of contemporary society, social concern, realistic portrayal of social inequities, call it what you will. Such an approach may be summed up in the words of a young scholar: “The themes and subjects of Anand are thus mainly aimed at depicting the contemporary social situation as seen and felt by the individual. More often than not, Anand’s individual finds himself in an unenviable situation, being a victim of effete traditions and cruel customs, a corrupt social order or a heartless administration. Portraying graphically the hapless individual in his pitiful and helpless predicament, Anand aims at touching the humanist chords of the reader’s heart with a message perhaps that only a concerted effort can overhaul the none-too-happy present social situation.”

We may, as M.K.Naik does, divide Anand’s stories on the basis of theme: 1) stories about the traditional way of life, (a) those which bring out its limitations, (b) those its strengths; 2) stories which show up the age-old political and social attitudes; 3) those which deal with the modernity theme, (a) the impact of modernity on the traditional way of life, (b) the relationship between the colonial Indian and the White man, (c) the Indian response to post-Independence events; 4) stories which highlight the position of women in traditional Hindu society; 5) those which bring out the exploitation of the poor and the oppressed; 6) stories which display a lyric awareness and a poetic spirit.

The extent of overlapping is reduced if we make the basic mood of a story the decisive factor. The basic mood often highlights the part played by technique in a story, and thus facilitates the study of the elements of the story. Theme then becomes as important as characterization and the form of the story demands as much attention as the methods of narration. The danger of such an approach is that criticism can become academic and the critic a pedant. Were such criteria to be applied to Anand’s stories the categories would approximate to this division: farces, satires, symbolical

stories, humorous stories, stories of mood and atmosphere, allegories, fables and, where authorial slanting is apparently absent, “objective” stories.

It is difficult to lay down which approach is the best for Anand’s stories because he does not practise one form of the story but many, ranging from the sketch to the plotted tale; because characterization is achieved by a variety of means; because greater skill is on display in the shorter form; because the stories deal with more subjects than the novels; because Anand’s backgrounds are as varied as the individuals who come alive in his hands. All that we can say is that, ideally, each story suggests its own criteria.

Since however an analysis of each story is beyond the scope of this study, we have chosen the basic mood as the criteria of division in order to briefly comment on the salient characteristics of each resulting group.

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Whatever the story, satire is hardly ever absent though its force and form varies in each story. Satire lies like an undercurrent below each story. In stories like “A Pair of Mustachios” and “A Kashmir Idyll”, it takes the form of farce.

The source of inspiration in this group of stories is the North Indian tradition of farce, based on the fable, which seeks its effects through exaggeration and studied mockery. In his farces, Anand presents the thoughts, actions, and even the appearance of the well-to-do as ludicrous. They are drawn as pompous and foolish. Anand blows them up like balloons before bursting them. The bigger the balloon the louder the explosion. In all these stories, Anand adopts a pompous style, presumably to heighten the farcical effect.

Anger underlies the satire of a group of stories of which “Mahadev and Parvati”, “The Gold Watch” and “The Hiccup” are good examples. In these stories Anand discards the approach of the farces. Gone are the exaggeration and the mockery, also

the pompous style. The inequities of the situation are so great, the prejudices of the characters or custom so entrenched that the author fails to be amused. He delivers a blow bluntly rather than a feint.

Social concern dominates a third group of stories. In stories like “The Cobbler and the Machine” and “The Tractor and the Corn Goddess” Anand expresses his social concern by means of symbolism. The machine is the symbol of progress. Progress lies in harnessing nature through technology. Anand hopes that in the process the rigidities of the caste hierarchy will break down and human relationships will be rationalized. At the same time Anand is aware that vested interests can use the machine to further oppress the under-privileged, as in “The Cobbler and the Machine,” But he is also aware that the inherent commonsense of the peasant, convinced of its potential, will accept the machine as the villagers do in “The Tractor.” Thus in his social parables Anand is aware of both sides of the coin of progress.

There are certain situations which do not have to be presented as farce, angry satire or social parables in order to make their impact felt. It is enough to state them. Good examples of what may be described as objective stories are “A Promoter of Quarrels,” “A Rumour” and “A Confession.” They tell about the oppression of the poor by the rich; also about the oppression of the poor by poor. The poor have as little sympathy for each other as the rich have for them. They set people against each other, and in other ways show that they are not angels either. In admitting shades of grey Anand reveals himself a realist. In these stories mythology is used extensively. The doings of gods and goddesses, which form a real part of the psychology of the poor, represent the standard against which human actions are judged. Myths provide the metaphors of everyday conversation.

Just as atmosphere is the most striking feature of these stories, characterization marks a group of stories which mirror the relationship between Indians and their

colonial masters. Three stories, “Little Flower”, “Professor Cheeta”, and “The Lady and the Pedlar” examine this relationship against English settings. The burden of these stories is that there can be little communication between the two races. Professor Cheeta, despite his marriage to an English woman, fears that Englishmen will attack him when he creates a scene in the British Museum. In “Little Flower”. Old Arjun Singh is suspected of marking friends with little Jeanne with the intention of kidnapping her.

When the scene shifts to India Anand pictures the last eventful days of the British Raj. Anand’s short stories, unlike his novels, do not portray English characters; there are only references to them. The common thread in this group of stories is the desire of Indians to throw off the foreign yoke.

Mood and atmosphere are the predominant characteristic of another group of stories. In stories such as “Duty” “On the Border” and “The Plantian Tree”, Anand focuses with intensity on the state of mind or feeling of a character, recording in detail the slightest change in thought or emotion, freely mingling the present and the past, the actual and the desired lives, and thus giving the reader closer and deeper insights into frustrated, agitated lives. Or, Anand may shift the emphasis slightly and give equal importance to the setting of a character. Where he succeeds, the effect is such that we actually breathe and move in the character’s environment.

Though “The Lost Child” captures the colorful atmosphere of an Indian fair, it really belongs to a distinct group of stories which feature children and can be read on the two levels of reality and allegory. “The Lost Child” describes a child’s response to the world of colour and movement at the fair. He demands from his parents many of the sweets and trinkets on sale. They refuse to oblige him. He strays, gets lost, and begins to cry. A kindly stranger offers him the sweets and toys he had earlier demanded but all he longs for is the security of his parents.

In most of his child stories, Anand shows deep understanding of the child mind and psychology. No doubt there are exceptions like “The Conqueror” in which the impression we get is that of an adult imagining how a child sees things. No such criticism is valid if these stories are read as allegories, and the child is seen as symbolical of modern man, baffled by the mysteries of the universe, seeking answers which elude him, and retreating into little private worlds.

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Mulk Raj Anand’s characters and types are convincing. Anand seldom describes their individual features or physical characteristics. They come alive through their actions and behaviour. As for atmosphere, a sense of place is uncannily conveyed. Most of the stories give a feeling of actuality. They are not far removed from reality because, as Anand explains, “most of my stories take off from real situations, incidents and newspaper reports.... The situation of ‘The Maharaja and the Tortoise’ really happened, the ‘Man Who Loved Monkeys More than Human Beings’ really lives. Also, the fight over the ‘Mustachios’ went to a court of law.... Fortunately, I have kept cuttings of most of the incidents which went in to the making of many of my stories”. Anand’s short stories are marked by vitality and variety because they spring from real life.

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In these short stories, as in his novels, Mulk Raj Anand tries to adapt English to the expression of vernacular idioms and thought-processes. He does this in a number of ways. He makes literal translations from the vernacular: “You eat the bread of illegality” (“Tu haram di roti khain-da-hain”). Anand used these transliterated phrases not only as part of the dialogue of his characters, but also as part of the narrative: “No one counts his own curds spoilt.” Anand interpolates Punjabi and Hindi words in English sentences. He distorts the spelling of English words, as “haspatal” for

hospital.

Some critics find this manner of adaptation unacceptable. In the short stories at least, Anand's transliteration does succeed in creating the effect of verisimilitude, of conveying the flavour of regional speech. Anand's is not the first instance of the literal translation of the idioms and turns of phrase from one language into another; it has been attempted successfully in other parts of the world before. Moreover, he distorts only those English words which have gained currency in everyday use; he spells them as the man in the street pronounces them. It is a fact that even educated Indians interpolate English words in their conversation. What is at fault in the short stories is not the device of transliteration but the author's lack of moderation in the use of the device.

As a stylist, Anand is not discriminating. The construction of his sentences is loose. Long sentences follow each other in rapid succession, destroying the emphasis he might have achieved by interpolating a short sentence. They weary the reader by their monotony. Anand is fond of circumlocution. Even when it is not called for, his diction can be pompous. Stilted phrases and language may serve a purpose in his farces but they are not suitable for the other stories. At times Anand twists English idiom. In "The Liar" for instance, he uses an idiom to convey a literal meaning: "He (a shikari) taught me to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. "It is certain that Anand in this story is not working towards a ludicrous effect.

In stories of mood and atmosphere, his tendency to overwrite is exposed. In these stories he conveys feelings and mood and heightened experience, not indirectly by means of images, symbols or metaphors; he tries to describe them in words. Feelings, nebulous or definite, are difficult to convey in concrete words. The result is a mass of words, which acts as a barrier between the reader and the object or feeling. Verbiage defeats Anand's very purpose. "Birth" is an illustration of this failing.

Overwriting is not confined to language only. As a craftsman too Anand sometimes slips. He has apparently never paused to consider whether the score or so extra words at the end disturb the balance of the story. In “The Informer,” for example, the last hundred words are unnecessary. The story should have ended once the weak, nervous character has been accepted for what he is by his friends. There is no need to drive home the point by stressing the doubts about him that always used to assail his friends.

Some of Anand’s descriptions are overdone, as in “The Kashmir Idyll”. He also states the didactic purpose of his stories instead of leaving it to the readers’ intelligence. Anand quite often uses the device of what is known as the Introduction, or the lead-up. Though the Introduction might reflect the taste of the times- it was fairly common in the forties and the fifties – in Anand it is often too long. Furthermore, his Introductions, by listing Indian customs, habit and idiosyncrasies, where they are not strictly germane to the story, lead to the suspicion that he writes with the foreign reader in mind. In the endings of some of his stories, Anand insists on flogging a pathetic situation into a bathetic one; excessive anger or compassion deprive him of his sense of perspective.

In spite of his defects, Anand, the first Indian short story writer in English of renown, is also one of its most important practitioners. His stories have vigour and vitality. He has written the short story in almost all its forms and thus anticipated the work of subsequent writers who specialized in one form or another. Thus, satire was to be handled in its variety by Khushwant Singh. Anand’s nationalism found a greater enthusiast in N.S.Phadke. Deb Kumar Das and Jug Suraiya were to try their hand at the Anglo-Indian variety of Indian English.

There was Anand’s influence and there was his example, Not only did Anand have a host of imitators, but a writer like K.A.Abbas could take up almost wholesale his

interests, attitudes and methods and use them with a degree of individuality.

Another aspect of Anand's achievement is that his stories remain a valuable document of the times. For the general reader they reflect conditions under the British and recall the days of Hindu-Muslim solidarity in one of the two states that was to be partitioned. For the reader born in the forties, they reveal a not-too-distant past when caste barrier and prejudices were as rigid as they had been a hundred years before. Above all, Anand's stories do give the impression of representing the centuries-old tradition of the masses. Anand the short story writer, like Anand the novelist, arrived with a vision of Indian life, and of what constituted the warp and woof of tradition.

Section II
CHAPTER 2
R.K.NARAYAN

Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan offer a study in contrast. Where Mulk Raj Anand states, R.K.Narayan suggests. Where the former draws in detail, the latter sketches. This is true of mood, character and atmosphere. Narayan is a meticulous writer, and, unlike Anand, he will hardly let a loose sentence pass. Anand attempts all forms of the short story; Narayan perfects one method. If Anand looks to the future, if he is a fervent believer in progress, Narayan is content to reflect on the past. Anand's concerns are social, Narayan's moral. Even though Narayan does not overtly pass moral and other judgments, he is interested in exploring the nature of life and reality.

The difference springs from the attitude of the two writers to their subject-matter, which in turn is affected by the society in which each lives. South Indian culture is more composite. Society in North India has felt more often the impact of alien cultures and hence is less composite. The quality of life around him makes Narayan complacent and Anand impatient. Anand is involved in the events taking place around him. Narayan on the other hand is detached. Narayan, for instance, issued his first three collections during the War years, in 1943 to be precise. Yet in no story is the Great Famine mentioned or the political movements of the time, or the effects of the War. The only reference to contemporary events is in "Gandhi's Appeal", "Lawley Road" and "Another Community," the last two appearing in a collection published in 1956. The two writers have one quality in common though: both write on a wide variety of themes, and the number of stories they have published in book-form is almost the same.

i. Patterns

A close study of Narayan's stories reveals that Narayan repeats situations and

characters in different combinations. The interaction between this permutation of character and situation is portrayed, not studied, described or analyzed. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions. As a consequence, new behaviour patterns emerge, and the variety of human life is displayed. Narayan nowhere states or even suggests his moral purpose, but the quiet, detached philosopher, completely free of the tendency to pass judgment, lurks behind all the stories.

A large number of Narayan's stories deal with children. An equal number are about animals. Some hold a mirror to the irony of life. Others reflect the thematic pattern of his novels. Narayan has written a number of delightful tall stories. In some stories his moral concern is more pronounced than in others. His parables on human existence and man's relations with God provoke thought

Narayan's stories about children and animals, such as "A Shadow", "A Flavour of Coconuts" and "At the Portal" among others, delightful in themselves, may be read as allegories. The norms, patterns and behaviour of adult human life are repeated in child characters. In the case of the animal stories, the animals are substituted for human beings. The backdrop remains the same, only the performers change. Some of the seriousness surrounding adult human life is thus shorn away, its prejudices exposed, and satire and irony suggested. Parody has the salutary effect of knocking the stuffiness out of our little enclosed, complacent lives. Narayan's tendency to work by contrast is more pronounced in this more than in other group of stories. Thus, "The Blind Dog" may be compared with "The Mute Companions," "Father's Help" with "Crime and Punishment" and "The White Flower" with "Seventh House"

The faithful pariah dog, in "The Blind Dog", spurns the chance of freedom and returns to the cruel blind beggar whom it helps to beg and who ill-treats it. In "The Mute Companions" the beggar is dumb and kind and the monkey who performs for him deserts him at the first opportunity it gets.

Both in “White Flower” and “Seventh House” a child is called upon to choose between a red and a white flower, and his choice will be taken as the will of God. The child’s choice shall decide whether a young man, Krishna, should marry the girl he loves in the face of ill-matched horoscopes. The children make a different choice in the two stories and the course of the comedy is consequently different. It is significant that the name of the young man is the same in both the stories, one of which appeared in Narayan’s first collection in 1943 and the other, “Seventh House,” in his last collection in 1971. This continuity of theme over such a long gap of time further strengthens our contention that Narayan conceives his stories with a purpose.

“A Willing Slave” deals with an ayah. She looks after the children of the household, and they leave her when they are six or seven years old. She seeks emotional security by returning to the youngest child and growing up with it. Thus Narayan’s cycle of human comedy is complete. He began by examining adult life against child behaviour and he ends with the double inversion of an adult willingly renewing her infancy.”

A large number of Narayan’s stories focus on the irony of life. Man plans a certain course of action; in the execution both the plan and the course change. Man strives for a certain prize; when he wins it he does not care for it. Man holds a certain principle; but his destiny is fulfilled when he breaks the principle. These stories express Narayan’s wonder at the mystery and waywardness of life.

In “The Trail of the Green Blazer”, for example, a pickpocket follows a man and in a crowded place picks his wallet. As he is about to throw away the wallet after removing the money he sees a balloon in it. He remembers the words the man had uttered when buying the balloon, and he is touched by the memory that it has been bought for a motherless child who will cry all night if he does not get the balloon. He decides to return the wallet. When slipping it back, the pickpocket is caught – for

doing the first good deed in his life. ”

Closely related to this group of stories are those which work out the thematic pattern of the novels. We may generalize that Narayan's novels follow a common theme – “a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order –followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy” (K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar) which teaches the character to accept life as it is, with its determinism and its fatalism, perhaps on a higher level of experience. The working out of the pattern in the short stories is different from that in the novels because of the limitations of the form. Very often the flight is not physical; the protagonist merely plans to change the normal order of existence in his own small way. Even before he takes a step to fulfilling his plan, something happens to make him give up all idea of disturbing normalcy. Like the novels, the short stories on this theme can be read on two levels, as entertainment, and as a reflection on the nature of life. Thus, in “Fruition at Forty” a pickpocket dashes Rama Rao's plans to celebrate his birthday with his family. Rama Rao's birthday gift to his wife is his resolve not to tell her about the theft, lest “She completely broke down”. We may compare this story with “The Trail of the Green Blazer”. “Fruition” reads almost like a continuation of “Green Blazer”, told from the other man's point of view; it shows what happens when the pickpocket does not return the wallet.

Although all Narayan's allegory satire and irony reveals a moral bent, he does not offer his stories as the narrative or dramatic exposition of his ideas. They strike one as stories which, first and foremost, delight. Indeed, our aesthetic imagination is stirred before our moral sense is aroused. In a few stories, however, this moral concern is more pronounced. “A Career”, for instance, narrates how a servant boy betrays his master and elopes with a pretty girl of the neighbourhood. Years later his master discovers him as a beggar, deserted by his wife and blinded by small pox. This story occurs in Narayan's first collection, *Malgudi Days*, in which the author's moral

concern is more pronounced. The concern becomes progressively less obvious in his succeeding collections.

By contrast there are stories about children and animals, about men and women in which Narayan is not a moral analyst but an amused if bewildered observer of life's variety and waywardness, a humorist in the true sense. Stories like "Attila", "Gandhi's Appeal", and "The Shelter" are difficult to classify.

In "The Shelter", a married couple separated for a number of years, seek shelter from the rain under the same tree. They begin a hesitating, comic conversation which almost turns into one of the quarrels which led to their separation. Both wish to return and make a fresh start. The husband even suggests as much. The woman knows instinctively that it will not work and she leaves him once again. By his own admission, this is one of Narayan's favourite stories.

There is a group of stories in which Narayan's aim is nothing more than provoking healthy laughter. These stories feature a liar and a boaster who is referred to as The Talkative Man. The Talkative Man spins tall yarns in which one fantastic happening follows another. As a character he has been more substantially drawn than Narayan's other characters. Assumed modesty and the habit of digression are two of his more engaging traits. The tall stories reveal a strong sense of atmosphere, perhaps because The Talkative Man's adventures take place in the unlikeliest places and he insists on describing at length the locales of his adventures.

As an archaeologist's assistant in "Roman Image" the Talkative Man discovers a small statue thrown into the river by a delinquent priest. The academic world regards it as a piece of great antiquity and worth, and a mountain of research springs up overnight. This story is a delicious satire on the sophistry and casuistry that sometimes marks academic research.

The fables provide a fitting close to Narayan's short stories, and conclude a

cycle which starts with a probing of the world and reality through a child's eyes. Maturity is all. "Uncle's Letters", giving serious advice banteringly views this cycle with detachment. When Nambi the story teller in "Under the Banyan Tree" loses his gift he is not dismayed, but returns with new insight to tell "my greatest story": "it is the Mother who gives the gifts; and it is She who takes away the gifts." The nature of Creativity – an egoistic preoccupation - has not been expressed with more humility.

The point of "Such Perfection" is that perfection is not for mortals. Soma the sculptor is not allowed to install the statue of Nataraja in the village temple because it is absolutely perfect. He refuses to countenance even a small flaw, like a broken anklet, and converts his house into a temple. With the start of prayer, the image breaks into the Dance of Destruction. All nature becomes violent and falls into a frenzy of destruction. A tree falls on the statue and severs a small toe. "God himself has done this to save us, people cried." Message and criticism combine in the understanding that man expresses himself in imperfection. It is enough if we strain towards the truth. This is as good a description as any of Narayan's exploration of nature and reality through his short stories, which he is too conscientious an artist to suggest by statement of sequential arrangement.

ii. Crafting the patterns

R.K.Narayan draws his material from the round of daily life in South India. Most of the characters belong to the middle class. Delicacy of touch is the distinguishing mark of Narayan as a short story writer. He relates his incidents in a quiet, even casual manner. He presents a slice of life and allows it to speak for itself. The same quality marks his delineation of character. Characters are not conceived as part of a plot. They exist independently, influencing action and being influenced by it. His presentation of character thus is not analytical, but dramatic.

Narayan reveals his skill by the various means he adopts in creating character.

Very often he does not describe a character's appearance, dress, mannerism or other physical attributes. Narayan relies on behaviour—normal or eccentric—to create an impression of character. Take the case of Ranga the casual labourer in “Four Rupees”, who agrees to retrieve a brass tumbler from a well, then practises all types of evasions to back out of the commitment. A characteristic turn of speech is another device Narayan uses to create character: Sam., the busy body of a male nurse in “A Breath of Lucifer”, “was a superb timeless being, who lived a thousand years behind the times, and who wanted neither food, nor roof, nor riches if only he was allowed to gaze on undisturbed at an old coin or a chip of a burial urn.” And, second, he caricatures, by exaggerating a gesture: “Really: he asked, pricking up his ears!” (as though the man were a donkey).

Whatever the method of presentation, all Narayan's characters share one characteristic: a beguiling innocence, the innocence of bewildered children in God's great world. Some critics have mistaken this impression to suggest that Narayan patronizes his characters. Such a reading is wrong. His characters strike us as living in their own right, springing from life, and at the end of the story merging into it,

Narayan's stories are rich in atmosphere. The sounds and sights of everyday life are evoked with the same precision as the eeriness surrounding an ancient and lonely dak bungalow or the dull round of existence in a small village like Kritam. In most cases, atmosphere is created by a few deft strokes or merely by focusing attention on a few details. A peculiar feature of the short stories, in contrast to the novels, is that outdoor life and scenes are more frequently represented than domestic activity or setting.

R.K.Narayan the short story writer is a humourist in the broad as well as the narrow sense, As a humourist in the broad sense he reveals a sense of perspective, an understanding of what life is. In the narrow sense, he is an amused observer of life's

foibles. Irony, gentle satire, caricature, exaggeration abound in his stories. These are conveyed in a language which is remarkably pliant in his hands.

Prof.Kantak compares Narayan's prose to and "One-stringed instrument (like that ukelele thing one sees farmers selling to city children)", and finds it inadequate of situations "which have emotional magnitude and complexity." While this may be true of his novels, the reader of the short stories does not experience any feeling of inadequacy. For one thing, the stories do not deal with moments of intensity. For another, the pleasure of a short story increases in proportion to its reticence and suggestiveness. It seems to us that what might be a shortcoming in Narayan the novelist becomes an advantage in Narayan the short story writer.

Narayan's stories have a peculiar, highly personal flavour. The reviewer in *The Listener* put his finger on this quality when he wrote, "But the fact remain that these stories give pleasure out of all proportion either to their subject matter or the skill with which they are put together. In some ways best known to himself Mr. Narayan's stories contrive a total impression that is greater than the sum of the parts, rather as though the areas of blank paper between the end of one story and the beginning of the next carried esoteric messages which linger in the memory and are suddenly comprehensible only when we put the book down and stare across the room... (These stories belong) to the kind of good writing which can only be explained in terms of the literary personality that it reveals. "

Section II

CHAPTER 3

RAJA RAO

Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan practise the short story as it is understood in the West. Seen in the light of this tradition, the short stories of Raja Rao are found to be lacking in many respects.

There is hardly any development in a number of his stories. The narrator in “Javni” tells us that she is a faithful, obedient servant; he reconstructs her past, mainly on the basis of her answers to his questions: when the family shifts, they leave Javni behind. In the absence of development, we would expect such a story to be a character-study, which it is not.”

In fact, Raja Rao appears to have little interest in character. Except for Motilal, the bania in “The Little Gram Shop.” Hardly any other character is sharply drawn. The descriptions of Javni and Akkayya the widow are casual. We have to guess the characteristics and features of Motikhan (“Companions”); the orphan Narsiga in the story called after him; Dattopant (“In Khandesh”); and others.

Raja Rao’s stories show little respect for the chronology of events. He does not appear to be interested in probing the individual consciousness or studying motivation. Nor does he deal with personal relationships.

Raja Rao’s ordering of material also appears to be casual. One result of this is that poignancy pathos slip into sentimentality. The narrator in “Javni” dwells at length on the sorrow caused by the parting with his old servant. Another consequence is repetitiveness. The first six pages of “Akkayya” are devoted to the child’s affection for the widow and his bewilderment over the significance of widowhood. The greatest defect of this approach is that it leads to formlessness. An analysis of one of his stories “The Little Gram Shop” will make this clear.

Ananda, the new arrival in Hyderpur, becomes curious about Motilal, the shopkeeper. One assumes that Ananda is introduced as the “angle-character.” But what follows is a lumpy narrative about Motilal’s humble beginnings and the suffering of his wife Beti-Bai. Then there is a description of the shop; of the living quarters and the byre behind; and of Motilal’s physical appearance and fondness for the hookah. His addiction is demonstrated by an incident, which also shows him up as a cruel husband and a rude shopkeeper. Ananda is suddenly introduced as a witness to the incident. Back to a long recitation of Motilal and Beti-Bai’s daily routine. Suddenly Beti-Bai has the feeling that her son, Chota, who had run away with a loose woman, will return; and Motilal feels that the Nawab Sahib will borrow money from him on this terms. Chota returns; but the Nawab Sahib does not borrow the money. Chota is then married to a girl of his parents’ choice. A silent affection springs up between Beti-Bai and Ananda. Motilal is duped by one of his debtors; he becomes mentally unbalanced; he is run over by a motor car. Chota and his wife do not get along, Chota returns to his mistress, and Chota’s wife dies during an epidemic of plague. Years later Ananda visits Hyderpur and finds Chota’s mistress running the shop

Where is the story-line in this meandering narrative? The story is not a character study. Round whom does the story revolve? Motilal? Beti-Bai? Chota? Ananda? The possibility of using Ananda as an angle-character, from whose point of view the action and developments could be shown, is not exploited. A proper use of this device would have proved a good method of controlling the unwieldy material. What is the final effect that Raja Rao is working for?

This does not mean that all of Raja Rao’s short stories are formless. Stories like “Companions” and “The Cow of the Barricades” are complete in the Western sense, and move without digression to the final effect.

The truth is that it is unfair to judge Raja Rao's stories by Western critical standards. It is not his intention to follow the Western genre completely. In most of his stories he appears to be experimenting with form.

Raja Rao seeks his inspiration in the folk tale, the popular legend or the mythological story. He models his stories on the roadside raconteur's art; he borrows the grandmother's method of unfolding a tale; he casts it in the mould of the temple moralist's story. In other words, he presents his material in the oral tradition of story telling. Oral stories share a few characteristics; they ramble, they are homely, and they are repetitive.

The digression may illustrate a point, expound an attitude or criticize a modern habit. A moral note, certainly earthy commonsense, is seldom absent in the traditional stories. Everything is seen in relation to the past. The meaning and significance of an event is sought in a legendary occurrence. Remedies for problems of the present are sought in the past. All this makes for continuity of existence.

That Raja Rao's stories represent a conscious attempt at experimentation is made clear by the foreword to his novel, *Kanthapura*: "Episode follows episode, and when our thought stops, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was, and still is, the ordinary style of our conscious story telling." How bold a step Raja Rao took when he opted to model his short stories on this pattern becomes clear when we contrast his work with how much of this tradition R.K.Narayan accepted, and what features he rejected, then he retold stories relating to legendary figures in *Gods, Demons and Others*. Narayan explains, "For one thing, I have had to avoid many theological or didactic interludes that considerably held up the narrative, sometimes for two or three days, as the story-teller halted at a particular point and went off at a tangent to criticize modern attitudes or expound a philosophy: I had to keep my focus on the sheer narrative value and omit all else."

Raja Rao, on the other hand, has in his stories retained as much as possible the features of the old tale. The narrator in “Kanakapala” is an old garrulous woman relating all change to the rustic pattern of life, stressing a moral point of view, pulling up her imaginary listener to pay attention to her. The story, “In Khandesh” is cast in the form of the wandering minstrel’s tale – a refrain occurs intermittently during the narration, besides at the opening and closing of the story. “Tom tom...tom...tom...Tira Tira...tira tira...tira tira... tom tom tom...”

In both these stories Raja Rao’s aim is similar to that of the grandmother and the temple singer. His aim is not to relate history or examine motives or sketch character; these are matters the Western short story would deal with. Raja Rao is interested in concretizing Indian virtues and the Indian outlook. Human attributes rather than human beings interest him. It is Raja Rao’s Hindu temperament at work.

Such a temperament finds expression in symbolism, allegory and fable. This is the right approach to a study of the stories brought together in *The Cow of the Barricades*, the only collection of short stories Raja Rao has published so far.

Raja Rao’s figures are symbolical. Javni and Akkayya symbolize Indian womanhood, humble, strong and forgiving in suffering, gentle and compassionate. The cow also symbolizes these qualities. Raja Rao even related the symbols of woman and cow. “Javni, she is good like a cow.” When Akkayya’s children leave her, she “forgot them as the cow forgets her young ones.” In fact, double symbolism is a characteristic of Raja Rao’s stories. Javni and Akkayya stand for Mother India. Gauri the cow in the title story represents Mother India as much as Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent struggle is paralleled by Gauri leading the villagers against the “red man’s army” and dying for the sake of her convictions – “the fullness of love in all creatures.”

We can now appreciate that the “Little Gram Shop” should not be read either as a

narrative or a character study, but as a Morality on the continuity and permanence of life. In India, individuals do not matter, only institutions. Men may come, men may go, but the little gram shop goes on for ever.

The short stories of Raja Rao divide themselves into three broad categories. Stories like “Kanakapala” and “Companions” have not only the form of a legend but are based on legends. Three stories mythologise reality: “Narsiga”, “In Khandesh”, and “The Cow of the Barricades”. Two stories, “Javni” and “Akkayya” are worked out in terms of symbolism.

“The two serpent stories, ‘Companions’ and ‘Kanakapala’, are made of the elements of a folk legend or myth: a dream vision, a curse, a quest, and finally something tangible, (a tomb or a temple) as testimony to the truth of the legend. These are what Raja Rao himself calls *sthala purana* (in the foreword to *Kanthapura*), meaning thereby a legendary tale restricted to a specific locality.”

“Companions” is an allegory on the preparation man must make to attain God. The devout Pandit Srinath Sastri, because of one failing, his greed, is born a serpent. Like him, Motikhan, the juggler, is also in search of salvation. Under the surveillance of the serpent. Motikhan avoids money and women, meditates besides Sheikh Chisti’s tomb and acquires “eyes to see God.” Together both win salvation.

Unlike this story. “In Khandesh” represents a curious experiment. The form of the story is that of a minstrel who intersperses his tale with a refrain. The equivalent of the musical refrain has already been referred to (“Tom tom...”). Accompanying this refrain is another, a descriptive refrain this time, which fill in the background. “Men don’t walk in Khandesh. The swirl round and round upon their feet – and move forward. Birds don’t fly in Khandesh. They are carried on the billows of heat. Horses don’t move in Khandesh. The earth moves to them. ”

The matter on the other hand is radically modern; slice-of-life cameos which

describe the reaction of the villagers as they prepare to welcome the Viceroy and the Maharaja, who will pass through the village in a special train. It evokes, not just describes, the state of an old man who panics before the big moment and is killed under the wheels of the advance ballast train. The story is told in a series of pictures which are separated from one another by the powerful descriptive and musical refrains.

Just as Raja Rao experiments with form, so too he remoulds the English language to convey the idiom, the rhythm and modulation of his characters' vernacular speech. He does this without making nonsense of grammar and syntax. The effect registers best if Raja Rao's prose is read aloud. Raja Rao is the first Indian short story writer in English to use Indian English for narrative purposes. Other writers, like Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Ruth Jhabvala, use it mainly as dialogue. Woven into the narrative are translations of vernacular idioms and proverbs and quite a few coinages. These are perhaps the more obvious of the devices that convey the flavour of the Kannada language in English. Metaphors are another important means to this end. Raja Rao's metaphors are vivid, apt and beautiful. These reveal that there is direct contact between eye and the object without an intervening fog of words which separates reader and writer. The vivid metaphors contribute to the enrichment of another feature of these stories – atmosphere.

All the stories sharply evoke the atmosphere of South Indian villages, particularly of those in Mysore State. In the story "In Khandesh" the bleak surroundings come throbbingly alive.

We must stress that the metaphors and the non-English rhythms are not used by Raja Rao as decorative devices; they are integral to the conception and working out of each particular story.

The style of each story varies with the personality, stated or implied, of the

narrator. There are the leisurely rhythms of the garrulous old Venkamma in “Kanakapala”: “and if he (the serpent) is a quarter-of-an-hour one, you die in a quarter of an hour, a three-quarters-of-an-hour one, you die in three quarters of an hour, and you may know it by the number of stripes he has on his hood, one means a quarter of an hour....”

The movement of the sentences used by the person who tells the story of Motikhan is more brisk. “And at every village men came to offer food to Motikhan and women came to offer milk to the serpent, for it swung round children’s legs and swung out, and cured them of all scars and poxes and fevers...Plaque went and plenty came, but Motikhan would not touch silver.” The tone is intimate in “Akkayya”. In “Narsiga” it is tender. It is colloquial in “Javni”

The prose is peppered with what may be called “Indi-idioms”. One is the use of the double adjective: “My grandfather sat reading big big books.” Another is the use of translated idiom: Motikhan threatened to “catch him and break his thirty two teeth.”

Characters are distinguished not by their individual features but by the manner in which they would appear in the public mind or in the locality. “Eight-verandahed-house-Chowdhayya” or “cardamon-field-Venkatesha.” Geography becomes meaningful by landmarks: “by the pipal tree where the fisherman-Kodi-hanged-himself-the-other-day.” Time has little meaning for the Indian and is measured thus: “that happened when our little Ramu was going through his initiation ceremony – that is some four years to next Dassera.”

The *Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* remains a valid experiment in the short story in English. In the Foreword to the collection Raja Rao is apologetic about owning these stories, since he is a different person from the man who wrote them. This can hardly be considered a literary reason. On literary grounds, Raja Rao need

hardly have apologized. He remains the only Indian short story writer to experiment with form. His experiment indicates one direction the Indian short story in English could take.

Section II

CHAPTER 4

MANJERI S. ISVARAN

Manjeri S. Isvaran made his literary mark as a poet before turning to the short story. The bulk of Isvaran's short stories are preserved in seven collections. Isvaran's first collection, *Naked Shingles*, contains his most representative work. Present in this collection are conflicting elements which continue in varying and increasingly wrong proportions, to form the basis of his art. On the one hand there is realism, a keen eye for detail, colour and movement, hard-headed awareness of how human beings behave. On the other hand, there is idealism, a desire to make men conform to how the author would like them to behave, and more than a dash of sentimentalism. On the one hand, there is delicacy of touch, an undertone of humour, carefully pared language and a striking, even poetic use of words. On the other, there is a certain striving for literary effect, the allusions are academic and the metaphors mixed.

Then again, there is a skilful use of cinematic techniques, where a story is told in terms of images. At the same time, there is a tendency to convey impressions through a mist of words.

Unfortunately, in each subsequent collection, the elements of the second group come to the fore as those of the first group recede. The evocative, eloquent method of story telling is increasingly replaced by an elaborate, verbal approach.

Almost every story in *Naked Shingles* begins with a description of a static scene, a picture, almost like the opening frame on the screen and sets the tone of the movie. After this follow a series of short scenes, or a scene, which work out the drama suggested in the opening scene, confirming the suggestions or changing their tendency or explaining in flashback why the picture is composed as it is.

The first story in this collection, “Merry-Go-Round.” is representative of Isvaran’s earlier method of story telling. It opens with a scene at a bar, where Ratnam is drinking. There is movement and colour and the words are chosen for their energy.

“ One sharp quaff, elbow upwards, and he thumped the glass on the table, his left hand meanwhile pulling a purse out of the pocket. He clinked out two careless rupees and the arak-seller paid him back a balance of five annas.

“Ratnam walked out of the shop; nay, Ratnam skipped on a light fantastic toe, for a humming-bird hopped, fluttered, and preened in the green garden of his heart smiling beatifically, sure that the world was smiling at him.

“Mangi was a cubistic female, all harsh lines and angles and no flesh, with a look that betrayed how unexpectedly the sap of her sex had turned bitter.

“At the sight of her husband coming frisking along, her heart turned into a little hibiscus of anger, flushing her face with some of its unseen redness.

“ ‘You promised you would not drink today, ‘ she said, controlling her feelings with a great effort.

“It was four o’clock in the evening and the sun was still hot, but he was in a world of dews and mellow as the moon, which effect he achieved by his silence.”

We cannot help but be drawn to the onomatopoeic appeal of words like, “he clinked out two careless rupees,” or the humorous touch in the description of Mangi as a “cubistic female,” or the poetic imagery of a “little hibiscus of anger,” or the figurative description of Ratnam’s mood as a “world of dews and moonbeams.”

As Ratnam accompanies his wife and son to the fair, our sympathy gradually shifts to his wife. We learn from the quarrel of husband and wife that the confectionery shop Ratnam owns is going to rack and ruin because of his addiction to drink. The process would have been faster had not Mangi, suppressing all thoughts of womanly pride and dignity, taken it upon herself to run it. At the fair, the boy insists

on riding the merry-go-round, and the wooden horses come alive in Ratnam's drink-crazed brain as his favourites at the races. He shouts out their names and dies when he feels that he has lost his bet. The small boy matures suddenly after the incident. We must note the symbolism of the title; for Ratnam, life was one huge merry-go-round and he could not have cared less.

In most of his later stories, Isvaran's moral streak comes to the fore, as in the story "Justice", which describes how a boy who steals a few bananas is sentenced and convicted, and it seems to show how criminals are made by society's iniquitous laws. Isvaran's later stories are overtly melodramatic too. "No Birds Sing", which centres round working class life, is a good example. The son, Chengalami, is killed in a road accident; the daughter, Valli, commits suicide in a tank; the father, Verian, goes mad – all because of the step-mother, Irulayi, who takes to running a brothel and finally goes mad. Even the Bollywood would have found the story too eventful!

There could be no greater indication of Isvaran's decline as a short story writer than the fact that he should have succumbed to the tendency of the Indian short story writers in English of the fifties to preface their stories with long Introductions. Almost all the stories in *Painted Tigers*, which was published in 1956, are burdened with superfluous Introductions, and the stories clogged with unnecessary comments. "Crutches", which occurs in this collection, gets under way after six long pages. In other stories Isvaran tends to digress even in the middle of the story. It is sad to see the writer who could be sensitively suggestive ending his stories with unnecessary or unnecessarily long explanations.

Often these endings are prompted by a moral purpose. Isvaran sees to it that poetic justice is done to his characters – not only in this world, but also in the next. Indeed the supernatural plays an important part in his stories. It is the same writer who had laughed – to come back to the contradiction in Isvaran – at popular beliefs and

superstition stories in like “At His Nativity.”

Even though the approach changed, Isvaran never changed his subjects, which may be broadly said to centre around conjugal relationships, child life, and the life of the poor living on and off the streets or the beaches. But this constancy of theme proved a doubtful virtue since it did not enrich his art.

Manjeri Isvaran is one of the few Indian short story writers in English whose work has attracted some short of critical attention. Unfortunately, however, this attention has proved a handicap. Most of the critics have praised his short stories excessively and thus raised false expectations. The reader’s response is conditioned by the critics’ words when the short stories should be allowed to make their own impact. Critics have in fact done Isvaran a disservice.

K.S.Venkataramani the noted author of *Murugan the Tiller*, and *Jatadharan and Other Stories*, wrote a rhapsodical introduction to *Naked Shingles*. Other critics, like D.Anjannyulu and K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, have taken their cue from Venkataramani.

The critics have not made an independent assessment of Isvaran’s short stories. It has escaped their notice that when Isvaran turned to the short story, his creative powers were perhaps on the decline. His first collection, *Naked Shingles*, represents his best work. The authority of such names inhibits the assessment of a younger critic like C.V.Venugopal who must pay the customary tribute, “an amazing power of observation, an enviable grasp of the medium, and a high imaginative faculty,” before proceeding to find fault with his “literary echoes” or defending the use of “Supernatural interference”, or criticizing his tendency “to ramble or philosophize” or his habit “of leaving little to the imagination.” C.V.Venugopal concludes by excusing Isvaran’s shortcomings on extra-literary grounds – by bringing them under the all embracing umbrella of “Indianness”. “The unique nature of Isvaran is indeed his total

Indianness, his literary echoes from the English masters notwithstanding”.

Manjeri Isvaran is too good a writer to be forgotten. Today his books are either out of print or available in a few libraries. It is ironical that they are not to be found on the shelves of any library in his native Chennai. Isvaran deserves a conscientious editor who will shift the grain from the chaff, and present a collection of his selected stories for the pleasure of the discerning reader

Section II

CHAPTER 5

OTHERS

(a) Khwaja Ahmad Abbas

One of the writers who shows the influence of Mulk Raj Anand is K.A. Abbas. Abbas champions the cause of the under-dog, but his treatment is not as skilful as Anand's.

Abbas conceives his short stories on the lines of the Hindi film, and presents types who exist as the personifications of the author's ideas. Often the whole story is used for this purpose.

Like the Hindi film-maker that he is, Abbas works out his stories in stark categories of black and white without any sense of artistic shading. He simplifies the situations, the emotions and the behaviour of people. The manner of his dialogue is modeled on that of Anand's but the content is filmic. It is non-realistic and stilted. His stories are replete with cinematic devices like coincidence, obvious physical marks like scars to facilitate recognition after separation, the long hand of chance and swift and unconvincing changes of heart. Like Anand, Abbas tries all forms of the short story.

Among the more interesting of Abbas's stories are those which record the events of Partition. Abbas responds to these events in a sentimental manner. It is likely that the events proved too momentous and intractable for his pen. Under-statement, even plain statement, would certainly have heightened the impact, as it does in one story, "Letar Fraum a Child to Mahatma Gandhi".

His usual approach is exemplified by a story like "Revenge". In this story, Haridas is bent on stabbing a Muslim girl in her naked bosom in revenge for the manner in which he was made to witness the rape of his 17 year old daughter.

Mercifully, she died soon afterwards. Haridas's victim is a pretty young Muslim prostitute. His desire for revenge dies when he finds out that her indignity is greater than his daughter's was, because she continues to live with it: beneath the padded brassiere are "two horrible wound scars"

The stories give enough indication that Abbas could have been a better writer if he had paid more attention to the story, to atmosphere, to characterization; if he were content with being a mere writer rather than a 'committed' one'.

(b) Ela Sen

If among the novelists the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 found its chronicler in Bhabani Bhattacharya, among short story writers it found Ela Sen.

Darkening Days (1944) is a collection of eight stories prefaced by a long essay on the famine, and also a foreword. The authenticity of situation and atmosphere springs perhaps from the fact that the stories have been culled from life. "Names have been altered, but the facts remain. These are not imaginary characters, no phantasies born of association with relief work". The power of the stories should not be attributed solely to their provenance in real life. Ela Sen is not lacking in the short story writer's skill. Her technique is sound and the language in which the stories are related is controlled. She has wisely reserved the purple patches for the preface. Although these stories have been written with a definite purpose, the author's intentions do not upset the artistic balance of the stories.

"Co-Wife" is typical of the manner in which Ela Sen blends the human and the topical. Lakshimi, married as a child of twelve, is happy in her marriage till the mid-wife announces that she will never bear children. Her husband, Subol, marries Soundamini, much to the sorrow and jealousy of Lakshimi. When the co-wife becomes pregnant, the famine breaks out. Subol and Lakshimi leave for the city in

search of food. They are fortunate enough to find employment as domestic servants. Moved by guilt, Lakshmi return to the famine-stricken village. She finds her house desolate and crumbling. In one room, she comes upon Soudamini, “or was it her skeleton... stiff and pale... and a squirming worm of an infant was sucking at her breast”. The co-wife is dead. Lakshmi picks up the child.” Forgetful of death behind her, nursing this spark of life in her arms, a new world unfolded before Lakshmi”

(c) Louis Gracious.

Louis Gracious, a traveling salesman for one of the largest manufactures of soap and tooth paste in the country, writes with authenticity about his native Goa. *Wild Winds* (1940), a collection of seven stories, has the distinction of being the first work of fiction to deal with the lives of Indian Christians. Nowhere does Gracious mention their religion or describe their towns and villages. All these facts come through incidentally. It is pleasant to read about a way of life totally different from what we have encountered so far in the work of other writers. Gracious’s work, paradoxically, is important for its documentary significance although the author never intended to document a particular way of life.

Among other notable writers of this period, G.K.Chettur writes in a colloquial style, and a touch of humour, about intriguing coincidental situations in *The Ghost City and Other Stories* (1932) ; K.S.Venkataramani, in *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937), depicts middle class life in South India and the individual’s response to social change; Kumara Guru in *Life’s Shadows* (1938) extols the traditional way of life at the expense of the Western one, in long, involved narratives that lack the unity of the short story; Dewan Sharar narrates historical tales of chivalry in *Eastern Tales* (1943); K.Nagarajan in *Cold Rice* (1945) creates interesting characters and situations in writing marked by a humorous undertone; Humayun Kabir in *Three Stories* (1947)

writes light satires about Muslim life in Bengal.

The efforts of all these writers from Anand to Kabir, between 1935 and 1950, contribute to make this period one of the richest, if not the richest, in the history of the Indian short story in English.

SECTION III: THE FIFTIES

Background

The period between 1935 and Independence represents, as we have seen, the most fertile period of the Indian short story in English. The temper of the times, Gandhi's influence, the epoch-making events, no less than the abundant talent of the practitioners of the short story contributed to this fertility.

The succeeding age was barren, by comparison or without. It is a common fact of literary history that a period noted for its rich and varied output is succeeded by one that is marked by paucity. But a historical tendency is not sufficient to explain away the barrenness of the decade beginning around 1950. To what then may we attribute this feature?

This decade was, in its own way, as historically important as the pre-Independence years. The elation of spirit fostered by the attainment of Independence was in no way less inspiring than the fervour of the fight for it. Independent India had to fulfill the hopes it had raised. Politically, Post-independent India became the most successful example of a Parliamentary democracy in Asia. Despite dire predictions, the uneducated public was not "swept off its feet by the extremists of the right or the left; a Parliament truly representative of the thought and feeling of ordinary Indians came into being." (Percival Griffiths).

The economic experiment was as momentous as the political one. Post-independent India was resolved to end poverty and ignorance, not by repeating the evils that followed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution in the West, but by profiting from the experience of Europe. India adopted the modern techniques evolved in the West, and thus hoped to jump the technological gap of a hundred years without wishing to subject itself to the rigours of a totalitarian regime. Sir

P.G.Griffiths, commenting upon this achievement, writes “it is the scene of the greatest experiment in socialism ever conducted in a freedom-loving country”.

In international affairs, the newly Independent country enjoyed such prestige as it had never known in recent times. India followed a policy of neutrality between the various power blocs, Its voices was heard with respect in international forums. This neutralism springs from the combined effects of philosophy, historical factors and present circumstances“.

None of these events or the euphoria inspired by them figure in the short stories of the time. Unlike the short story writers of the earlier decade, the writer in the fifties was not inspired by the events around him. For all he cared, they may not have occurred.

Was this lack of response the result of a harsher personality? It is true that none of the writers of this decade compare in stature with writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. What is more, the output of the new writers is poor by comparison. Most of them did not bring out more than a collection or two each. These writers are not interested in experimenting with language or form either. It is also surprising that the work of the older writers did not influence them. In artistry and polish too, most of the short stories written during this period leave much to be desired.

Section III

Chapter 1

ATTIA HOSAIN

Attia Hosain's short stories, however, are an exception. Restraint is the keynote of the style, craftsmanship and technique of the twelve stories in *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories*. This is the only collection of stories she has published so far.

Most of the stories deal with Muslim life and characters. The Muslim joint family is a tangible presence in almost every story. Presided over by the Begum, who is vigilant, sharp but kind, and with relatives floating in and out, the Muslim joint family, as presented by Attia Hosain, revolves round the zenana and the servants quarters.

Growing up in such a secluded world, the women who observe purdah imbibe beliefs which "are deep-based on generation-old foundations". When they are taken out into the wider world by their emancipated husbands they are at sea. The only manner in which they can react is bewilderment and anger. This is a theme Attia Hosain has handled sensitively in "Her First Party".

What of those women who never get a chance to leave the purdah? They are sympathetically presented as caged animals, as in "Time Is Unredeemable" which describes the anticipation with which Bano awaits the return of her husband. Bano was married to Arshad shortly before his departure abroad mainly as an insurance against his bringing home a foreign bride. Nine years have since passed. His only communications with his wife during this period have been short formal letters. In order to please her qualified husband, Bano learns English from Mrs Ram, a Cockney married to an Indian. Mrs Ram has little taste and less discrimination. Bano feels that she must greet Arshad in a new coat and saree. Whom should she consult on the current fashion, but Mrs Ram, who orders an ill-fitting out-of-date garment? Bano locks herself in her room on the day of her husband's arrival, afraid to betray her

happiness and her anticipation. Arshad is monopolized by the host of relatives the whole day. Late at night he enters her room, awkwardly hands out the worthless gifts he has brought for her. There is no communication between them, and he tells her that he is to sleep in another room. As she waits for an explanation, he feels sorry for her but all he can say is too comment on her clothes: “ ‘It reminds me ofmy landlady....no....of Mrs Ram.’

At last she was able to cry.”

The story ends here, and the note it strikes is one in which irony and pathos mingle.

Complete in itself is the world of the servant attached to the household. All their needs are looked after by their master. They are treated as individuals. The lady of the house even arranges their marriage. Their children find shelter, if not employment, in the sprawling household. After all this, what does it matter if the wages are meager?

The author finds material in their lives for half the stories in the collection. It is a world she has observed closely and she portrays it intimately. The characters in this gallery are many and varied. There is the old woman in “The Loss” who has suckled the narrator and is regarded by him as a foster mother. A cook, Kallo Mian, is the main character in “The Street of the Moon”. Revolving round him are others, memorable among whom is Old Mughlani, in charge of stores, who though half-blind, can see with the eyes of the worldly wise, “In The Daughter-in-Law”, a servant is allowed to bring home her infant daughter-in-law whom his son has abandoned because of her age. Things begin to be misplaced and the servants believe that she is possessed by a spirit, a Jinn.

This is a world of which superstition is an inseparable part. The author presents this aspect, not with irony or indulgence, but through identification. Besides the beliefs common to both the Hindus and Muslims of North India, Attia Hosain writes

about those beliefs which are peculiarly Muslim.”

“She weighed rice against the silver coin inscribed with the names of the Four Companions of the prophet and gave it to each person,” Each person has to chew it for a while and then spit it within a circle. This is a means of identifying a thief. “The rice would have drawn blood from the thief’s mouth”

It is to Attia Hosain’s credit that the portrayal of this world does not occupy first place in the stories. It comes through in casual touches. On the whole there is little direct statement or explanatory comment. There are times no doubt when the description of a traditional custom or practice tends to take up much space. This is particularly noticeable in “Time is Unredeemable” in which the ceremony attending Arshad’s arrival is not slanted from a character’s point of view. The marriage preparations and the marriage itself in “The Street of the Moon” are described at length. These descriptions are not really documentary, yet we comment on them because they appear overdone in the context of Attia Hosain’s spare and restrained approach in general. This restraint is most marked in “Phoenix Fled”.

In “Phoenix Fled” we see the changing world through the dimmed eyes of an old woman. During Partition, her children and grand-children wish to take her with themselves, but, rooted to the place she was born in, she has no intention of migrating. Her dolls are the symbols of this attachment, besides being the link with her little grand-children. “The live past was always happily with her, the present an irritating dying burden”. When the soldiers come, she cannot make out who they are – they could be any of the scores of people who keep going in and out of that house – but she senses that something is wrong. As her nostrils catch the smell of burning thatch, she thinks, not of herself, but her dolls.

A sensitive story, there is no mention of the Partition, nor a harping on its lurid details; the impact is great because of the reticence. The writing creates the illusion of

a blurred world, the view from old eyes.

Delicacy of touch becomes understatement in “After The Storm”. This is a very short story, carried forward mostly in dialogue, which describes the efforts made by the narrator to question a little girl, Bibi, about her past. The girl has apparently lost her parents during the Partition riots and has been adopted by a kind family. The child remembers little besides the fact that she was in an aunt’s house when some people attacked it. A man took her across the fields and she remembers arriving at a railway station. “Her mind refused to fill the gap between the refugee camp and her adoption”.

No details about background are given; the picture is as stark as the frame. The riots are mentioned obliquely, suggestively; “The desolation it brought was the visible expression of desolate hearts. The tainted wind blew hot from blazing homes, and carried the dust of devastated fields, and the dead....”.

In portraying a way of life no matter how subtly, an author often runs the risk of presenting types, not individuals. Attia Hosain has successfully steered clear of this tendency. Her characters impress us as individuals. They are created not by description, but by their actions. They spring into independent existence, as Attia Hosain conveys their stated of mind and feeling. The vision may be narrow, but the focus becomes sharp and concentrated. This approach is most apparent in “Phoenix Fled” and “Her First Party”, in which we see the surroundings through the sensibility of the old woman and the young bride respectively. This approach is slightly modified in presenting Bano in “Time is Unredeemable”. The camera which was looking on the outer world from the inside shifts by turns between two points of view, as it gives a subjective view of the outer world and an objective picture of the person’s behaviour. This method is used again in creating Kallo Mian. Yet another approach to character is the one used in drawing the personality of Shiv Prasad, the Hindu watchman of a Muslim family. He is observed both from the outside and given the third dimension

by his speech and reaction.

The economy with which Attia Hosain creates character is best illustrated by Mrs Ram, the English wife of the father-in-law's friend, the lawyer Hari Ram, in "Time is Unredeemable". "Of Mrs Ram's shortcomings as a teacher, her dropped aitches, her ungrammatical colloquialism, Bano was unaware".

Barely half a dozen words give the reader the clue to the background of Mrs Ram. The impression is reinforced when one is told about Mrs Ram's taste in clothes..

Kallo Mian is without doubt the most memorable character in the collection. He is pathetic and noble, pitiable and dignified. Despite all his waywardness he is a man with sense of responsibility. When he catches his young wife, Hasina, and Munnay, a son by a former marriage, together in bed – one of the most touching scenes in the story – he conducts himself with restraint. He does not create a scene for fear of the shame that would attach to him and his wife. It does not weigh with him that others already know about the affair.

There is an undercurrent of mild humour in Attia Hosain's stories, especially when she describes typical situations. But this arises less from her language than from the situation. She does not attempt humour through stylistic devices; "Mughlai appointed herself Kallo's representative in all consultations, while the Begum sahib looked after the interests of the bride."

The author does not seem interested in experimenting with language. Whatever experimentation there is, conscious or unconscious, is confined to translating dialogue from the vernacular, as here; "If she is to murder our nights as she did last night we need to be angels to work the next day."

In any case, there is no reason why Attia Hosain should experiment with language. Standard English is pliable enough in her hands to create an impression of and convey the rhythm of a particular way of life, of thinking and behaviour.

Section III

CHAPTER 2

KHUSHWANT SINGH

Attia Hosain and Khushwant Singh are the only two Indian short story writers in English who have risked publishing a collection of short stories before they had secured their reputation as novelists. Both Attia Hosain and Khushwant Singh went on to write novels which were well received.

Khushwant Singh is a man of many parts. He has been a lawyer, a public relations officer, a novelist, a historian and an editor. It is a pity that Khushwant Singh's variegated background and wide experience did not enrich him as a short story writer. It has merely made him worldly-wise, and in his short stories he insists on being a satirist. He has an instinctive understanding of the short story form, but he allows his pen to get the better of him. That is perhaps because he consciously plays the satirist.

Khushwant Singh has the satirist's eye. He tiles at many a revered institution. He exposes cant and humbug. Thus, in "The Voice of God", the voice of the people is a euphemism for the will of the British administration. A saintly but poor candidate loses the election even though the people vote for him. In the "Mark of Vishnu" the snake-worshipping Hindu meets his nemesis when the cobra he has nurtured on milk wreaks vengeance on him for the thrashing it has received from the boys of the household. The irony lies in the title: the cobra digs its fangs below the V-shaped smear on the forehead, the symbol of the preserver. "Karma", too, has an ironical title. Sir Mohan Lal, an Englishman in thought, action and memories, in all except the colour of his skin, is forcibly thrown out of this reserved first-class compartment as a cocky native by two drunken Cockney tommies. The Westernized Indian figures again in "A Bride for the Sahib", in which the satire is double-edged, simultaneously hitting at the grafted manners of this tropical species and at the uncouth habits of Indians.

The obsequious insurance agent, in the story, “The Insurance Agent” as well as the ambivalent hypocrite who claims that he has a clear conscience, in “The Man with a Clear Conscience”, arouse the author’s ire. In “The Great Difference”, the learned swami and the venerable maulana go abroad, attend a religious conference by day and by night impart worldly experience to a cute little thing who wishes to find out the difference between men of different religions. “Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle” satirizes a type which sponges for food and drink on others. The author finds the Indian Customs officers particularly trying in “My Own My Native Land”. “Mr. Singh and the Colour Bar” is about the pontifical, hypocritical Indian abroad, and “Rats and Cats in the House of Culture” deals with the American concern for pseudo-culture and the farcical nature of international conferences.

What more suitable targets can there be for satire? But Khushwant Singh’s treatment of his subjects is unsubtle. He takes extreme situations or juxtaposes sharply contrasted types. The disadvantage of such an approach may be illustrated by reference to “A Bride for the Sahib”. ‘Mr. Sen is the pucca brown Englishman who cannot speak an Indian language; he tolerates rice and curried fish but relishes lamb chops and shepherd pies. Yet such a man agrees to an arranged marriage to a girl brought up in a traditional home, who every morning insists on touching the feet of her lord and master. This situation, like so many others in Singh’s stories, is implausible. Given the type of man Mr. Sen is, he would be expected to marry a highly Westernized girl, if not a foreigner.

But then, for Khushwant Singh, the situation is merely a framework within which to mock at a host of failings: the Indian’s lack of respect for individual privacy, the calculating, business-like manner in which marriage are arranged, the disregards for hygiene in private and public life, the insensitive manner in which Indians use English, the pseudo-sophisticated airs of the club-going coterie. The satire, it would appear, is

more important than the story. He is not interested in exploring the possibilities of the situation. Had he done so, the satire could have been enriched.

His present approach has a number of disadvantages. For one thing, the part appears more important than the whole. For another, the author takes swipes at everything he sees but hits nothing. As in "A Bride", the jabs are not part of a strategy which will climax in a knock-out punch. In stories like "My Own My Native Land", "Kusum", "The Insurance Agent", "The Man with a Clear Conscience" the satire is diffused, and the stories rather resemble a balloon which bursts not with a bang but deflates because of a leak.

One of the factors responsible for this is the author's garrulity. The short story cannot bear the weight of words, and Singh repeats more often than is necessary. He is also fond of the device of the Introduction. More often than not, his Introductions are long. For instance two and a half pages are devoted to the history and description of Alice Springs, in "A Town Called Alice", and only one page to an old Baluchi camel-driver who will not return home because he has become a "dinkum Aussie".

There are many such pieces, particularly among his later stories. They can hardly be called sketches or vignettes, and may be described as "middles": In the story "When Sikh Meets Sikh", the point is that, despite all that he may adopt of his domiciled country the Sikh remains fiercely nationalistic: "The Constipated Frenchman", Victor Vincelas Jacquemont, whose most prized possession was a syringe (more a commemorative article than a short story): "Abroad and Not-So-Innocent" which narrates the author's odd experiences abroad.

On the other hand, excessive length spoils a good theme like "Rats and Cats in the House of Culture" and "The Maiden Voyage of the Jal Hindia", which laughs at the parochial spirit among whites and Asians abroad a ship.

Another reason why the satire appears to be not the natural dressing of the stories,

but their imposed dress is that Khushwant Singh does not portray character but type, and the extreme type at that. He must confront the swami and the maulana, not an ordinary Hindu and a lay Muslim, in order to mock at communal prejudices. Sir Mohan Lal in “Karma” and Mr. Sen in “A Bride” are the epitome of the Westernized Indian in pre-and post-Independence India. Various go-ahead types combine in Singh’s insurance agent: he gate-crashes at parties, is familiar with everyone, claims acquaintance with the press. “The Butterfly” (which could have been more aptly titled “The Chameleon”) describes a type which adopts and drops personality, manner, belief and cause as the occasion demands. Messrs Ghosh, Sundar Singh and Sambamurthy, in “Man How the Government Run”, are prototypes of the thousands of petty clerks who man the government offices: the story describes how they spend their day in office, chatting, patronizing the canteen watching a game of volley ball, rather than attending to their files. It is a satire on red-tape. Mr. and Mrs Kanjoos combine the features of the minor parasites of society. The couple enjoy free food and liquor and manage to wrangle berths on an official delegation abroad, not only for themselves but also their children. Their daughter, Bhooki Kanjoos traps an IFS officer, Budhu Sen, into marriage, which is made to coincide with Independence Day celebrations at the Indian Embassy, thus avoiding not only a dowry but also the expense of a reception. Even the labels, the obvious Bhooki (greedy), Budhu (idiot), Kanjoos (miser), show little imagination.

Khushwant Singh deals with a real character only in one story, “The Portrait of a Lady”. The portrait is that of the narrator’s grandmother, whose “lips constantly moved in inaudible prayer”. She had one diversion. She fed sparrows in the afternoon and allowed them to perch on her legs, shoulders, and head “creating a veritable bedlam of chiruppings.” With the prescience of the good she foresaw her approaching death. Round her corpse “thousands of sparrows sat scattered on the floor” – dead

silent. They do not eat the habitual bread the narrator's mother gives them. They fly off silently when the corpse is taken away. A touching story, which could have been made powerful with a little cutting.

Most of the stories neglect atmosphere, although Singh can vividly evoke it when he wishes to. Little obscure villages, the routine of ploughing and watering, the hot dusty afternoons, the cool nights – these and other features of the Punjab countryside and small-town life come alive in “The Voice of God”, “A Punjab Pastorate”, “The Rape” and “The Riot”. The last named story is a terrible indictment of communal passions; tensions are triggered into violence, murder and arson by something as trivial as the compulsions of a pariah bitch as she goes to seek a mate.

Khushwant Singh displays a predilection for the risqué. In “Black Jasmine” a man who failed to seduce a curvaceous fellow-student makes it up to her thirty years later when she is “one enormous mass of hulking flesh.” In “The Morning After the Night Before” the narrator discovers, after an evening of heavy drinking, his wife's brassiere in his pocket – very much to his disappointment for he had been under the drunken impression that he had seduced someone else. Such writing can be interesting if it is suggestive and skilful; unfortunately Khushwant Singh's anecdotes cannot bear repetition even over a chota peg.

A story particularly rich in suggestion (of the non-titillation type is “The Fawn.” Two friends shoot a fawn and its mother during an outing in the country. The type of emotion the story evokes depends on the way one responds to it; It can be read as a sketch of a hypocrite who says he hates killing yet performs the act with gusto; who claims that he must perform the ceremonial letting of blood (halal) out of respect for others' beliefs; who moans that life has given him a raw deal when all the evidence points to the contrary. We may also read the story as a document of man's inhumanity; the death of the fawn is touching, and we are moved when, hours later, the doe returns,

and is shot when she sniffs the corpse. Perhaps the best response to such a sensitive story should be a complex one.

Brief comments on a few other stories are in order. "Posthumous", in which the author imagines how his death will affect his friends, is a comment on the insignificance of the individual. "Death Comes to Daulatram" tries to heighten the mystery that surrounds life and its unexplained facts, and "The Memsahib of Mandala" attempts to simplify the supernatural. In these stories the techniques adopted by the writer are obvious.

Khushwant Singh's professional preoccupation may account for his casualness and impatience. His satiric view of life may be a direct result of his concern with the life around, or may be, even a kind of frustrated idealism.

Summing up, we may say that Khushwant Singh has the satirist's eye, but not his pen: he has the short story writer's temperament, even his craftsmanship, but not his application. It is ironical that the stories of one of India's leading editors, and an excellent one at that, could do with the sub-editor's red pencil.

Section III

CHAPTER 3

OTHERS

(a) G.D. Khosla

G.D. Khosla's *The Price of a Wife* is one of the few collections of short stories by Indian writers in English to run into three impressions. First Published in 1958, it was reprinted in 1963, while a third impression appeared in 1966. The reason for the success of the collection is extra-literary: the reputation of the author. G.D. Khosla moves with ease in many worlds.

Among literary reasons for its popularity, the first could be the fact that two of his stories have won prizes: "The Athlete" won pride of place among Indian entries in the contest organized by the Hindusthan Times, in association with The New York Herald Tribune, to select the world's best short stories; "The Kidney Stone" secured first place in a competition organized by a well know Indian magazine.

The second reason is that Khosla's stories are easy to read. In construction, his stories could serve as models in a course of literary craftsmanship. The development is clever. The story is neatly rounded off, and the reader ends it with a smile on his face.

More so, because of the nature of his subjects, rather subject. Marriage is the central motif. A number of stories expose marital infidelity, the woman more often not being the transgressor. Khosla handles a number of forms of the short story with confidence.

The foregoing, flattering as it is, says very little about the quality of the stories. One hardly comes across any memorable characters (except one) in his stories. Khosla views his characters from the outside and presents them by description. He adds atmosphere in a heavy literary manner. Although Khosla writes fluently, his

language is not racy, and, today, appears a little dated.

The prize-winning story, “The Kidney stone” is Maughamesque not only in approach and construction but also its cynical attitude to women and passion. “The Witches Pool” strongly recalls Maugham’s “The Man From Glasgow”. In “Gold Lace”, the peon, Sundar’s attachment to his livery reminds one of Akaky Akakiviech’s attachment to his coat in Gogol’s story, “The Cloak”. In fact, Khosla seems to find it hard to handle characters and situations which do not spring from literary sources. He is the master of stock situations.

Khosla is at home only with characters he knows at first hand, like the Englishmen he studied with at Cambridge, and the lalla (businessman) of his native Punjab, as in “How Sohne Shah Once Lost his Temper”.

This story is a character study of a popular and prosperous cloth merchant. Though honest, Sohne Shah is perpetually engaged in litigation – because others are not equally honest. A devoted husband, he refuses to marry after his wife’s death.

One day he feels a desire to eat yogurt. His daughter-in-law untruthfully tells him that there is none in the house, but, later, Sohne Shah sees her serving it to her husband. In his anger, he decides to remarry, not for his own sake, but for his daughter-in-law’s – lest he should harm her the next time he loses his temper. Since then he has three varieties of yogurt served to him with every meal, although he hardly touches it. His reason:

“ ‘That is to remind me of my lapse and my way of atoning for the wrong I did to my daughter-in-law. It is a very mild punishment I inflict on myself, for I do eat the dahi sometimes but only when the desire is not very strong. The punishment of my son and daughter-in-law is much severer, for I have now two more sons by my second wife and the eldest gets only one third of my property instead of the whole!’

Perhaps it was my imagination but I thought I was Sohne Shah’s generous lips

curl in a malicious smile as he said this. ”

The ending shows up Sohne Shah’s pious and selfless actions in a fine light of irony and ambivalence. He is the only character G.D. Khosla has drawn with shading and skill.

(b)S.K. Chettur

Along with Khosla’s “The Athlete,” S.K. Chettur’s short story, “Ladders are Unlucky”, was selected as one of four Indian entries to the competition organized in 1950 by The New York Herald Tribune.

Almost all of Chettur’s stories are set in South India. Unlike Khosla, Chettur does not pile up detail in order to create atmosphere. Because he is so thoroughly soaked in his backgrounds the feel of the South, with its coconut and mango topes, its temples, its wayside railway stations, comes through without much effort.

Chettur writes on a limited number of subjects. He builds his stories round local superstitions; a fisher-folk belief about “sea-maidens who induce men to swim out to their death “is worked out in the title story in *The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories*. He presents incidents and anecdotes connected with official and club life. These stories usually take the form of reminiscences retailed among a group of friends, and the purpose of the tale is often to expose the venial sin of an high-placed official or deflate some self-important personage. Finally, a few stories reflect the changing times of the fifties.

In most of Chettur’s stories the incident or situation is of primary importance, and it takes precedence over character. But he is interested in character only so far as it helps to work out the situation.

Unfortunately, a large number of stories are small incidents blown up to resemble stories. In some of them, Chettur has not been able to pin-point the significance of the incidents. Instead, he often intrudes to point a moral in a series of incidents. This

tendency of his waters down whatever irony or satire there might have been. Chettur's fondness for adding a literary allusion would affect the reader similarly were it not for the fact that in most cases the allusion is apt and it takes the form of a brief quotation.

All these elements suggest a raconteur, and these stories have a light conversational tone. At the same time he suffers from the conversationalist's fault of not knowing when to stop. He describes trivial details which the reader usually takes for granted. A mannerism of Chettur's is to slip unwittingly, and not for a comic purpose, into officialese.

What prevents the stories from being pedestrian is the author's capacity to see and communicate the humour of a situation, a remark or a gesture. At times the humour is verbal, and his stories are strewn with a number of witty sentences. Humour is Chettur's saving grace.

(c) Sachindra Muzumdar

Sachindra Muzumdar has very little in common with either G.D. Khosla or S.K. Chettur, both I.C.S. officers. His background and interests are totally different, and these have affected his choice of subjects and characters in his short stories. He was born in a village near Calcutta and he took an active part in sports.

Of some interest to the reader is the Author's Note to *Creatures of Destiny*, a collection of sixteen stories; it suggests the critical yardsticks with which to judge the stories.

Muzumdar makes three points in the Note. First, he acknowledges his debt to the masters of the form, who, in his opinion, are k

Kipling, Tagore, Maugham and Maupassant. Second, he admits of a "constant and conscious fight of resistance to keep my identity clear of their mesmerizing influence." Third, Muzumdar states what he imagines to be his credo, his interest in Man, "his

struggles and tribulations, and the workings of destiny. A situation to my mind is only of secondary or tertiary importance.”

Muzumdar’s achievement contradicts each of his professions. The stories are imitative in subject, presentation and language. The conscious and constant fight, alas, has been an unequal one. Muzumdar has reproduced the form but misconstrued the spirit of his models. He serves up his stories with an Introduction, which, instead of being enlightening, amusing or perceptive, presents a trite generalization. Muzumdar interrupts the flow of narrative with tiresome comment. He does not offer the point as a logical conclusion; he superimposes it on the pattern of events.

Muzumdar is not satisfied with ordinary human beings. Only unusual types attract him. His heroes are circus performers, artists, authors, wrestlers and singers and even a super-human. Unfortunately, the professions of these cardboard characters are merely romantic labels without the least influence on their personality. Similarly, the backgrounds (including Burma in “New Medicine”) are merely decorative.

Muzumdar’s language is not the natural dress of his thought but an ill-fitting garment. He is long-winded and the Victorian mannerisms of his style are irritating.

The only story which bears a personal stamp is “The Holy Man’s Seat”. A sadhu with tantric powers asks the priest and keeper of a burning ghat to procure a corpse for his use as a seat during meditation. When the priest refuses, the sadhu raises the spirits of all those whom the priest has sent to, neither heaven or hell, but “unredeemed ghostland”, by performing the last rites haphazardly. The priest dies of fright, and his corpse serves the sadhu’s purpose. This story might just about squeeze its way into an anthology of Indian Supernatural Stories – if one were proposed.

(d) N.S.Phadke

N.S.Phadke in where *Angels sell Eggs and Other Stories* has no moral

concerns like Sachindra Muzumdar nor does he deal with unusual types. Both writers are alike in that their characters are unreal people and that their manner of writing is stiff.

All the stories reflect the motifs of the Bombay film. A young man and women in love, parental opposition, a pair of brothers one good one bad, the flood of nostalgia and other gimmicks used for no other purpose than to give the heart-strings a wrench. A good example is “Garlands and Garlands” which shows us a young actress recalling her past as she watches the premiere of her picture – the lover who seduced her and the army officer who saved her from suicide in the nick of time. When the lights go up, a nurse hands her a bouquet. It has been sent by the army officer who lies in hospital with a wooden leg. She throws up her career and marries the wounded gallant.

Phadke has a narrow concept of human nature. His women even when they marry for love, keep one eye on their husband’s bank balance. All his women characters expect comfort if not luxury from marriage. The women are earthy and they enjoy sex. His men, less substantial than his women, seem to have one aim in life: to provide, if married, for their wives, if not, for themselves.

The language in which these subjects and cardboard characters are presented is a mixture of various elements. He mixes American slang with staid English idiom. A turn of phrase often suggests that it has been transliterated from the vernacular. His attempts at humour appear strained because his facility with the language is limited.

Only in one story does Phadke refuse to see life in preconceived patterns. “The Whistle” reveals a suggestive use of psychology. For Radha, the policeman Shripathi’s mistress, the whistle is a symbol of happiness. It reminds her of her happy childhood in the village. In some subtle way it also expresses sexual fulfillment with Shripathi. Shripathi goes to visit his wife and children in the village, and Radha,

unable to hear the separation, follows him. On the way she is misled and raped, her molester calling his companions by blowing a whistle. Back in the city, Shripathi does everything to make her happy, but he cannot erase the memory of those sharp notes of the whistle. The symbol of happiness becomes the instrument of torture.

SECTION IV: THE SECOND FLOWERING: 1960-1970

Background

By the time collections of short stories began to appear in the sixties, certain changes had appeared in society. Independence had, paradoxically, led to the growth of a class that combined the worst features of both the Western and the traditional way of life. For this class Westernization meant going to the club and throwing fashionable parties. They were attracted only to the surface glitter; they did not care for the spirit of Western culture. While the novelists explored the serious effects of the clash between modernity and tradition, the short writers, particularly, Ruth Jhabvala, chose to see the lighter aspect of this encounter. While the novelists examined how the educated Indian tried to adjust himself to the Indian social system, Ruth Jhabvala observed the behaviour and situation of the Westerner (domiciled or just on a visit) against the Indian background.

Bunny Reuben also deals with false values, although not those of the pseudo-sophisticated Indian or the simple-minded Westerner. He exposes the hypocrisy, cant and corruption of indigenous society.

Subject matter influences treatment. Accordingly, we note, that more satire has been written in this period than at any time before. Moreover, this satire is practised with sophistication. The range of Ruth Jhabvala's satire is wide. Concentration takes the place of extensiveness in Bunny Reuben's satire.

Almost as a corrective to the satirical outlook, is the attitude of writers like Ruskin Bond and Kewlian Sio. They do not wish to expose anything or poke fun at anyone, and their laughter is not harsh. They accept human foibles. They write about ordinary people and about simple everyday incidents and encounters. Their touch is light and soothing. They find it more rewarding to focus on the beauty rather than the folly of life.

Both these attitudes, anger and acceptance, are bred by a settled society. By the sixties, India had found its feet. She had come to learn that she was not cut out to play the exaggerated role in international affairs that she had taken upon herself in the fifties. On the domestic front she had learnt that economic change and social reform cannot occur overnight. She had adjusted herself to a slower and more natural pace. The wars with China and Pakistan in 1962 and 1965 had brought Indians together and had fostered a spirit of unity. Though none of these social, political, military and economic events find mention in the stories, the stories are a product of a society that has been shaped by these events.

Note must be taken of a paradox in this period. In the sixties the critics of Indian writing in English became vociferous over questions like, whether the Indian mind and sensibility could be expressed in English? Could, or should Indians write in English? Could English take root in India?

These questions would have been pertinent in the thirties, when Anand R.K Narayan and Raja Rao were experimenting with English. In the sixties the writers continued to write in English, but there was little conscious experiment. The writing of the period proved two things: English had adapted itself to use in Indian hands; the critics were asking their questions and expressing doubts two decades late.

There is little self-conscious “Indianness” in the language of the short story writers of the sixties. What Eunice de Souza says about Bunny Reuben’s short stories applies equally to other writers of the period: “No question ever arises about the probability of village women or others speaking English; no justifications are called for, no defences are needed.” Even in the case of writers like Ruskin Bond and Kewlian Sio, who may be said to write British English, the question of authenticity does not arise. This is a sign of maturity. And maturity marks all aspects of the Indian short story in English in the sixties.

Section IV

CHAPTER 1

RUTH PRAWAR JHABVALA

Both Meenakshi Mukherjee and C. Paul Verghese have excluded a discussion of the writing of Ruth Prawar Jhabvala in their books on Indian novelists in English on the ground that her origins are not Indian.. Both, however, concede that she has competently dealt with urban life in India. Ruth Jhabvala's non-Indian origin is too flimsy a ground on which to exclude a writer who occupies a unique position not only in Indian writing in English but also in Indian literature as a whole. Born of Polish parents in Germany, educated in England, married to an Indian and resident in India till the late seventies, Ruth Jhabvala is free from the tendency of the regional writer to romanticize his subject matter. At the same time she cannot be as remote from the Indian scene as the Western writer who comes to India on a short visit with the sole purpose of finding material, mainly colourful, for his books. Her approach to her subject matter may be described by the paradox, detached involvement. Her non-Indian vision coupled with her involvement in the Indian situation leads to an objectivity and a detachment rare in Indian writing in English (by virtue of an alien language which presents reality at a second remove.)

Ruth Jhabvala published five novels before she issued her first collection of short stories, *Like Birds, Like Fishes*. A novel followed, and then her second collection of short stories, *A Stronger Climate*. Then came another collection, *An Experience of India*. Her latest collection is *How I Became a Holy Mother*. In most of her novels, Jhabvala deals with the nouveau riche, the upper middle-class educated Indians, and the British in India. In her short stories, the subjects and the interests are substantially the same.

The short stories reveal the range of Jhabvala's gifts better than the novels.

They embody all the characteristics and some of the themes of her novels. Thus, “The Aliens” and “The Young Couple” describe the effort towards adjustment made by Peggy and Cathy, both English, married into joint Indian families. In an earlier novel, *Esmond in India*, Jhabvala has described the reactions of an Englishman married to an Indian girl.

Again, the greater compression inevitable in a short story turns what in her novels are defects into merits in her shorter fiction. For example, Jhabvala’s characters are not usually rounded. What she does is that she takes a trait, a habit or a mannerism and repeats it a number of times. As regards situation, she states or satirizes it, seldom analyzes it, at most hints at causes. In a novel such people become tiring and show up as two-dimensional characters and the situations appear flimsy. Such treatment, however, is ideal for a short story.

This advantage is also apparent in the description of certain Indian habits, like uninhibited yawning, belching, or other noises, in company. Since the repetition is much less frequent in a short story, the description does not lose its effectiveness or tire us as it does in her novels.

Ruth Jhabvala’s stories divide easily into a number of groups on the basis of certain common characteristics. Ruth Jhabvala’s approach to her characters, the manner in which she creates atmosphere, her attitude to her subject matter, her handling of dialogue and even her writing, are different in each group.

i. The Non-Seekers

The superficially Westernized Indians, the officials and their wives and the nouveau riche provide Jhabvala with targets for her satire in one group of stories. These Indians live in lavishly decorated houses, attended by a host of liveried servants. The women more often than not are members of various committees. The officials

and their wives keep to their class and entertain by turns. Inanities form the staple of conversation at these parties. Their offspring play tennis, go for picnics, and the girls cut their hair short. These Indians spend the blistering summer in the hills.

In these stories Jhabvala works by contrast. She contrasts situation and character, character and character, aspiration and achievement. Irony is inherent in such an approach. Variation in emphasis leads to satire. Humour is added by direct or indirect comment. “Lekha” and “The Aliens” are representative of Jhabvala’s approach in this group of stories.

The narrator in “Lekha” is a type of the sophisticated superficially Westernized wife of a high Government official who speaks glibly, thinks shallowly and is content in her self-deception.

“Some of our old customs are very pretty, I know – the lighting of little lamps on Diwali. For instance, which we always do because the children like it so much – but it is not in keeping with modern times to observe as many of them as Lekha did.”

The story is a delicious essay in revelation – it exposes the petty mind of the narrator and the other women in her clique: narrow, mean, catty, jealous. The occasion of the exposure is the marriage of the head of the Department to a girl who observes the traditional fasts, is a good Bharat Natyam dancer and who rejects the Western way of doing up a house. Her affair with an artist shocks the self-acclaimed Westernized narrator, even though her affair is child’s play compared to the promiscuity prevalent in the West. The satire is double-edged. Even as the hypocrisies of the other women are exposed, Lekha stands revealed as a naïve person, not the serious orthodox woman she appears to the others.

The tone is harsher in “The Aliens” because Indian habits are seen from the point of view of an English girl, Peggy. This story describes half a day in the life of Peggy, who finds it difficult to reconcile her ideal of orderly, disciplined living with

the slovenliness, amounting almost to chaos, of the joint family into which she has married. Peggy's attempts to find a little privacy are as futile as her exhortations to her husband to mind his weight. Like the men, the women eat too much, and proudly sport their huge breasts and hips. There is excessive preoccupation with sex. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law quarrel frequently.

But in "The Aliens" this Indian trait does not provide the domestic comedy it does in Jhabvala's novels, notably *The Householder*, mainly because one sees things from Peggy's point of view.

In this group, Ruth Jhabvala presents character both by statement and by suggestion. At some point in the story, usually in the beginning, she states the dominant characteristic of the person and later refers to it or shows it in operation.

Jhabvala uses dialogue for comic effect. In the speech of her pseudo – sophisticated characters Jhabvala succeeds in capturing the nuances of everyday conversation which they conduct in a homespun variety of English. Jhabvala gains her effects by showing a group of people talking about different things at the same time; often, by making them talk at cross purposes; by making it clear that the conversation has little relevance to the situation.

"The mother-in-law stroked Suraj's shoulder and said sweetly, 'Eat son, eat in peace', though he hardly needed this encouragement. He leaned forward and helped himself to pickle. 'Poor boy, how hard he has been working all morning in the office'.

'Today we got our consignment of station wagons, ' he said. 'They have been delayed four months.'

'Four months.' 'echoed the mother with exaggerated sympathy.' So much trouble – trouble and worry, that is how it is in business.

'And that girl with the fat legs, she is also trouble and worry? Sarla said.

'Children who don't eat are taken away at night by the jackals, warned the

Ayah.”

Jhabvala, however, does not use dialogue as a means of creating character or presenting the interplay of characters through it.

Jhabvala portrays with authenticity and irony that other Indian trait, indirectness of speech, not only during marriage or business negotiations, but also in everyday life.

For this purpose Jhabvala uses dialogue that conveys the nuance of the vernacular from which it is translated or adapted. This dialogue is comic, serious or dramatic as the occasion demands:

“The food that was eaten in our house! Two seers of meat were brought from the bazar everyday, and fish also, and chicken.”

Atmosphere in this group of stories is created by casual strokes, a suggestion here, a brief description there. This is in sharp contrast to her practice in the other stories, particularly the ones depicting lower middle class life.

ii. The Seekers

In “The Aliens” the contrast between two ways of living is made easier by the juxtaposition of an English type and Indian types. Jhabvala uses this approach more intensely in her second collection *A Stronger Climate*, particularly the six stories under the head. “The Seekers.” The stories in this collection show a maturing in Ruth Jhabvala’s art. The cool, casual writing of the earlier collection is replaced by a more studied prose. Where atmosphere was earlier suggested by casual references, it is now drawn by detailed description. The comic note is deepened; there is less frequent use of external comic devices like the contrast between profession and practice.

The characters have less of the typical in their make up than the characters in the earlier collection. This may be because Jhabvala has more sympathy for her

Western characters, or simply because she knows them better.

Her characters are employees at the British Council or High Commission, scholars on a short visit to the country or girls who leave home to meditate in an ashram in the Himalayan foothills. All these characters do not conform to the pattern of the Westerner's life in India. Ruth Jhabvala satirizes even as she describes this pattern: they rent "expensive, up-to-date flat (s) in an area full of other such flats and of people (mostly non-Indians) very much like themselves in status, income and way of living;" the Westerners all seem "in the tradition of the white man in the colonies, and the fact that the tradition had been modified did not make any fundamental difference to their personality. Nowadays they were expected to pay tribute to Indian culture as exemplified in art, architecture, dance, and so on; to have some (carefully selected) Indian friends; occasionally to serve Indian curries at their parties; but these requirements once fulfilled, they were free to follow their natural inclination and speak disparagingly of the weather, the servants, and – after the Indian friends had gone home – of the Indian character."

Those Westerners who go to the other extreme are equally legitimate objects of Jhabvala's satire.

"One eschewed the social round and concentrated, Indian-style, on developing the soul or the self, or whatever it was that clamoured for deliverance. This was the way taken mostly by unattached lady secretaries at the High Commission or librarians of the British Council, who took to wearing a saree and traveling round the country in third-class railway carriages. Most of them went very eccentric indeed and were not a pleasure to know."

But Jhabvala's interest in five of the six stories in this group is the Westerner who steers clear of these two extremes. "The Biography" is the most interesting story in this group.

“The Biography” is worked out in terms of contrast. Jonathan Jones, who comes to India to collect material for a biography of a great dead leader, is contrasted with Miss Bridget Law, a writer whose subject is *The New Woman*. The critical insight of the former is matched by the adulatory zeal of the other. Anita, the dead leader’s niece, who comes from a thoroughly (not superficially) Westernized family (cucumber sandwiches and lemon sponge cake served at tea), is contrasted with the new breed of politicians represented by “the minister” who “ate crudely and with relish and was served by a pockmarked servant boy in torn clothes. Sometimes from behind the screen doors came the sound of women’s voices – the Minister was said to have many daughters, as well as sheltering various widowed sisters – but none of these women ever appeared, for the family was what was known as old-fashioned and the women kept to the inner rooms.”

The point of view shifts from Jonathan’s to Anita’s to the Minister’s, so that one can grasp and understand the different forces at work in the New India. Does the thoroughly Westernized Indian, as opposed to his superficial counterpart, belong to India, is the question the story seems to ask? Is this breed more alienated in the surroundings than the group which has been attracted by the surface glitter? This impression comes across when, towards the end, Anita suddenly turns round and asks Jones, “Why don’t you write my biography?”

iii. The Sufferers

The seekers have the choice to leave India when they have had enough of the country. But Dr Ernest (“An Indian Citizen”), Miss Tuhy (“Miss Sahib”), and Boekelman (“The Man With the Dog”) have burnt their boats. Miss Tuhy is typical of these self-exiled foreigners.

She is an English teacher who does not go home after Independence. When the new government does not find her sufficiently qualified to teach, she goes to England,

but, unhappy among English children and the dim, cold surrounding, she returns to India, takes cheap lodgings in a crowded bazaar and becomes involved in the petty affairs of the landlady's daughter, Sharmila and her children. In a fit of nostalgia she takes them on a holiday to an English boarding house in the Simla hills. The holiday is cut short because the management complain of the children's lack of manners. (The contrast highlights the difference between two ways of life). The holiday is an awakening. Sharmila's quarrels with shop keepers in the bazar and the unrestrained grief of the mourners at the landlady's cremation, emphasize for Miss Tuhy the truth that she can never belong here. But she cannot return home because the holiday has exhausted her savings.

In contrast to her other foreign characters, Jhabvala has given Miss Tuhy, Dr Ernest and Mr. Boekelman more generic and individual features than she has to the others. Their characteristics and mannerisms are described at length. Jhabvala's technique in these stories is more narrative than dramatic, and the stories, instead of examining these characters against a specific situation, or against other characters, have been conceived as minor biographies. Jhabvala's tone, though comic, is quiet, and the atmosphere is filled in instead of being sketched.

iv. The Other Sufferers

These characteristics also mark the stories which centre round lower middle class Indian life. In a different sense, the members of this class are sufferers too, though Jhabvala nowhere uses this description. In almost all the stories in this group, satire is absent. Where irony is present it is either tempered by compassion or it is mild, as in "The Widow." The lot of this group is harsh; they have no pretensions like their superficially Westernized counterparts. For these two reasons they have not been made the objects of satire. Jhabvala presents this class with sympathy. If the author cannot claim to be an 'insider', her understanding of these people is as deep as any

educated Indian's, and her portrayal as authentic.

“A Loss of Faith” traces from childhood the life of Ram Kumar, whose work as a salesman in a cloth store is one facet of his existence. The other is crowded living, the responsibility of unmarried sisters, widowed aunts, a demanding wife, an unemployed drunken elder brother who fascinates his wife, mounting debts and a suffocating traditional pattern of life. His only act of protest, at a late age, is the breaking of a display doll because its mouse-tooth grin seems rather stupid to him. The incident is humorous but the humour is too grim to provoke laughter.

The narrator in “The Interview” comes from a family similar to Ram Kumar's. This time the situation is seen not from the point of view of the breadwinner, but that of an irresponsible dependant. He is dull, and he cannot retain for long the jobs his brother finds for him. His wife pleads with him to do well in the interview he is due to appear in so that they can live separately after he gets a job. The narrator cannot understand the urgency of her need. He is more concerned with the attention his sister-in-law pays him because of his looks (another parallel with the earlier story). He goes to the interview, becomes nervous while waiting to be called and leaves. Pathos mingles with comedy in this story.

“The Widow”, “The Interview”, “A Loss of Faith”, “Like Birds, Like Fishes” and “Sixth Child” are grim-comic pictures of lower middle class life with its hordes of dependants and too few bread-winners, greedy relatives, crowded living, mounting indebtedness, families proliferating because the Indian will not stop begetting children until he is “blessed with a son”; small men with small ambitions; a world that takes more than it gives.

v. Approach

Ruth Jhabvala displays her versatility by the various means by which character, dialogue and atmosphere are presented in the different group of stories – each suited

to the subject in hand. Within each group, however, she tends to repeat character and situation. But these she does with no higher purpose than to write another story. Unlike R.K. Narayan, she has no moral aim, no desire to examine old truths in new settings. Consequently her irony differs from Narayan's, in whose writing ironic undertones are suggested by the means by which situation and character are presented. Jhabvala, on the other hand, defines, almost points out her intentions.

As a satirist, Jhabvala invites comparison with Khushwant Singh. Singh presents extreme types; Jhabvala's types have many individual features. Often her types come alive as characters. In Singh, the situation illustrates types; in Jhabvala there is some interplay between character and situation. Where Singh manipulates his characters like puppets, Jhabvala allows them greater freedom of movement. Khushwant Singh's satire is cerebral, Jhabvala's dramatic, hence more subtle and more enjoyable.

Section IV

CHAPTER 2

BUNNY REUBEN

If Ruth Jhabvala's methods invite comparison with R.K.Narayan's in their casual artistry, her short stories provide a complete contrast to the work of Bunny Reuben. Jhabvala's art is studiously casual; Reuben's is highly studied. Jhabvala follows a simple, straight line from beginning to end and the occasional flashback takes the form of casual reminiscence. The machinery of Reuben's stories is elaborate, and the shifts in time, place and sequence are consciously executed, as on the screen. On the whole, Jhabvala lightly sketches her characters; Reuben paints them heavily, or describes them at some length. Ruth Jhabvala's writing has a conversational tone; it recalls the sitting room. Even though Reuben's voice comes through in his stories, it reminds us of the recording room; it is the commentator's voice.

Bunny Reuben is a paradox. He is a film journalist and publicist for film stars and high budget films. He has even produced a film. He is the author of a novel, *You, I and Her*. As a serious writer, he has published his short stories in American "little" magazines. The sub-title of his only collection of stories, *Monkeys on the Hill of God, Eight Angry Stories of India*, indicates their number and nature.

The paradox of Reuben the man extends to his stories as well. The situation in most of the stories recalls the Hindi film; the man of integrity (in "The Head Clerk") who is obliged to take a bribe because five daughters have to be dowered off; the boy and the girl (in "An ordinary Love Story"), belonging to different communities, who take courage in both hands and take the decision of their lives; the proverbial, uninvited guest at marriage feasts; the aged prostitute whose rough manner cloaks a heart of gold and who from her death-bed unites two lovers and even provides for them; a man who consciously rejects his beloved and sells himself in marriage to a

gross but rich woman (in “Monkeys on the Hill of God”). All these situations have the potential of a tear-jerker.

What transforms them from formula writing into serious stories is Reuben’s abundant talent. The characters assume an independent existence. They become living characters we can believe in. The texture and the feel of the surroundings are re-created with power. Feeling is presented as sentiment, not sentimentality. Often the sentiment is not stated but suggested.

This paradox in approach persists even in the working out of details. In the midst of excellent writing there are poor patches. Beautiful images are succeeded by others that are strained, to say the least. Subtle and artless symbolism occur side by side. An excellent craftsman, Reuben sometimes overlooks a weak link. In characterization too he slips sometimes. A highly individualized character like the go-getting hero of “The Professional Mourners,” for instance, acts and speaks like a tough on the screen: “he got up quickly came round the table and kicked the young man in the stomach - your cheque-book, write out fifteen thousand rupees he took it smiled at the woman as he gave it to her”

Similarly, top heavy adjectives occur in abundance in passages marked by the sensitive choice and use of words.

(i)

So much for Reuben’s broad characteristics as a writer. Coming to the features of his stories, we find that his association with films has influenced his technique as well as his outlook. There are swift transitions in time, place and sequence, as on the screen. Mood, feeling and atmosphere are varied and presented in similar terms. We often get the impression that we are reading, not a film script, but the transcript of a film. Take this example: “in long shot the cheeky peon Dhondhu berated by Miss

Bapat, their rapid lip movements shape the familiar protestation counter arguments droned by the clatter-clack-cackle –and-din of the government office”

Here there is not only movement but also the background noises from the sound-track. A frame is suggested; the tables, typewriters, the whirling fans – all this in the foreground; at the centre, the figure of Miss Bapat and Dhondur; in the distance, the movement of people, the indistinguishable babble and the noise of typewriters.

Often the story moves forward by means of images. At times, a word, taking the place of an image, serves as the occasion for a flashback. Apart from the visual image, the effect of montage and flashback, the dramatic contrast between two scenes, is a device, particularly its presentation, that Reuben has learnt from the cinema. In the following extract the mood of quiet and peace is built up before it is suddenly and violently shattered.

“The carpet was all wet but he unfolded it, spread it under the champa tree. By degrees, they settled down on it, and the golden silence wove itself around them.

Silence.

Screams.

Wild, hysterical screams which rent the idyll, tore them asunder and in multi-projected images he saw so many things simultaneously as he stumbled to his feet, his wife screaming like a lunatic, she crouched into a little ball and groping here-there for her clothing, not finding them, himself struggling in to his shorts....”

Reuben even conceives of his narrative as the commentary which accompanies the action. It is for this reason that most of his stories, particularly “The Season of Marriages” and “The Professional Mourners,” can be read aloud with effect.

Reuben’s writing has the inflexions of the spoken word, The impression Reuben’s voice gives is that of a man who has so much to tell – the scene, the thoughts and feelings of so many people, the sounds and smells [around him](#) – and so little time to

tell it in that he must condense, skip colon, semi-colon, even comma. His words stand out stark, like images, with their own associations. In most of the stories the words are not part of the paragraph but of the broader pattern of the spoken commentary. While the looser pattern aids the flow of the narrative, the impact of image-words creates an effect of intensity. This effect is further strengthened by the use of hyphenated words. The result is that Reuben can secure any effect he wants to.

Reuben makes a spare but striking use of imagery. Besides serving as decoration and illustration, it is used as a substitute, a means of suggesting emotion. In the following example, Bunny Reuben resorts to metaphor in order to avoid cheapening a beautiful sentiment: “he was with her and only with her was he wide open green plains as far as the eye could see and there were no glass-fragment-encrusted walls keeping himself in and everybody else out.”

Besides imagery Reuben uses symbolism to convey his meanings. In the title story the ascent of the hill is symbolical of man’s quest for fulfillment and peace. Its use in “The Season of Marriages” is more disguised.

But besides such brilliant writing, there are occasions where the visual technique degenerates into gimmickry. At times the imagery becomes strained, as here, “all the years ... of existence were layer upon layer of finely ground humiliation piled methodically on that innermost rind ... which men call personality...”

In relying on the association of words to create the effect he desires, Reuben frequently lapses into verbosity. His hyphenated coinages, like “corridor-corrupting” or “looming-large pension”, can become artless. Did he have to call his heroine Shanti and her husband Kashi, in “Monkeys” in order to hammer home the point? If Reuben has borrowed the technique of the cinema, he has also borrowed its clichés.

In an effort to bring out the associations of words Reuben often relies on adjectives. Besides slowing down the narrative, an excessive use of adjectives tends to

crowd the picture as in “the skull-capped old bori, bushy-eye-browed and goatee-bearded, a faintly lecherous gleam in his tired eyes.”

(ii)

We cannot but notice that recurring features are a characteristic of Reuben’s work. In five out of the eight stories, the men are weak and the women dominate them. Two stories have writer-heroes both of whom are given to procrastination. And Reuben’s endings have a certain similarity.

There is the Head Clerk who, after spending the evening with his typist, must return to his humdrum life with his wife and three daughters “unmarried yet.” After the idyllic interlude at the farm “In the Mango Season” the man must go back to the city with his wife, just as Kashi must obey his wife’s orders, though “salt burned wet behind his eye-balls.”

The recurring motifs suggest not so much a limitation on the part of the author as his optimism, the desire of his characters to rise above their circumstances, to hope and strive for a better life. If they fail, they have the consolation of having striven, of being conscious that an ideal exists.

As for the obvious characteristics of Reuben’s stories, we could do no better than to quote Eunice de Souza.

She writes,” the themes he explores range from love, sex, poverty and class conflict to mysticism. And he handles with equal assurance, a variety of techniques form the naturalistic plot construction type to the stream-of-consciousness.

“The world Reuben depicts is for the most part life as the lower middle classes and the near destitute of India know it. It is a world of desperate respectability and compromise, of poverty and urban degradation. The crumbling neighbourhoods, the narrow alleyways littered with refuse, the anonymous streets and the vast depressing halls of government offices where a large proportion of this class spends its life are

visualized in clear but unsentimental detail. They are traps in which the human spirit is corroded and withers away.”

In his poorer stories, Reuben gives the impression of parodying himself, which brings us back to the central paradox** : in all his stories Reuben uses the situation, the characters, the actions and gestures, occasionally the dialogue of the formula Hindi film, but transmutes them with his gifts into something throbbing and individual.

Footnote

** Failure to grasp this basic contradiction in Reuben’s stories can lead to amusing consequences, as happened in the correspondence in *Thought* between Meenakshi Puri, who reviewed the collection, and Hamdi Bey, who wrote a rejoinder to the review. Bey described the story Mrs Puri liked, “In the Mango Season”, as reading “more or less like a Hindi short story, and the Hindi short story, like the Hindi film is difficult to enjoy.” Mrs Puri turned round and leveled the same criticism at one of the two stories Bey had singled out for praise. “‘The Season of Marriages’ is a well known gimmick about the professional wedding or shradh guest. My Bey finds Hindi films and short stories difficult to digest, but not this gimmick.”

Section IV

CHAPTER 3.

THE GENTLE VOICES

The work of Ruth Jhabvala and Bunny Reuben throws into relief the stories of two writers, Ruskin Bond and Kewlian Sio. These two writers find their inspiration in the humdrum round of daily life; they capture a passing moment with its rainbow of significances; they deal with the apparently trivial happening. Their stories are usually short. Their language is as simple as their technique. If passion marks Reuben's stories, compassion marks those of Bond and Sio. If the laughter of Jhabvala is tinged with satire and irony, theirs' is laughter pure and simple. The phrase, Gentle Voices, aptly sums up their philosophy as men and writers.

(a). RUSKIN BOND

Ruskin Bond, the better known of the two, has written over three hundred stories. Criticism of his work has consisted, mainly, of skimpy reviews in a few odd newspapers. One, by P. Lai, referred to him – in friendly fashion – as a “peddler of boyhood dreams.” Someone also complained that there was no sex in the collection called *The Neighbour's Wife!*

Bond is the link between the British writers on India of the nineteenth century and the present-day Indian writers in English. The nineteenth century writers may be divided into two broad categories; those, who, like William Delafield Arnold and John Lang, wrote chiefly about the life of the English in India; and writers like William Browne Hockley, Philip Meadows Taylor and Alexander Allardyce who focused with intimate knowledge on indigenous Indian life.

Kipling combines both these influences. Ruskin Bond's work also has affinities with that of Kipling, particularly its interest in the supernatural, the animal and child-world, and in its evocation of local atmosphere. (Ruskin Bond has even written

a story in which he meets the ghost of Kipling in the British Museum and the two discuss Kipling's writings). Bond's treatment of these subjects however is worlds removed from Kipling's.

The former's greater sympathy and gentle humour bring him in line with a third nineteenth century tradition, that of non-fiction writers like Edward Hamilton Aitkin and Philip Steward Robinson, who wrote about familiar sights and the ordinary events of Indian life in a pleasant, semi-humorous and compassionate manner.

Ruskin Bond deals with ordinary people; he writes about everyday events; his settings are simple and exotic without appearing so. His treatment of the faceless people one meets during one's daily routine reveals that they have individual histories—"mysterious fires smouldering beneath...rather drab exteriors." He writes among others about the box man, who hawks odds and ends; the untouchable who consoles the author during a period of loneliness and fear; a tongawala; a bent-double beggar; an amorous servant; English spinsters and army officers living retired lives in a hill-station. Most of the stories take their titles from the characters. The manner in which Bond creates an effect of verisimilitude is revealing; "Many of my stories which seem autobiographical are in fact far from being so. I deliberately do them this way – it must be the Walter Mitty in me. But I do try to get the background right."

Bond perceives a pattern and a meaning in the humblest life. For instance, Kundan Singh, his servant, "was not very efficient, he ate more than most people, borrowed money, gambled in the bazar, drank raw country liquor, and generally overslept in the mornings" Bond dwells on his affairs with women, mostly married ones. Kundan Singh dies defending the country. Yet the author finds this man's life meaningful: "His youth had been free and easy, he had sown his wild oats, and before he could become old and decrepit and useless, he had died a hero. That is something very few of us are able to achieve."

The manner in which Bond presents commonplace events brings out their significance. There is very little action, as commonly understood, in his stories. Most of the stories tell how the narrator met a certain character, what they did and spoke about and how they parted. There is no attempt at trying to impose a pattern on these events, no straining to squeeze out a significance, no attempt at moralizing. Life is a wonderful story in itself.

The relationship this brief association creates is beautiful. In one story, the narrator describes the two days he spent showing a girl from Copenhagen round London. Together they savour the sights, sounds and pleasures of the city. When they part they make "no promises – of writing, or of meeting again. Somehow our relationship seemed complete and whole. As though it had been destined to blossom of those two days. A courting and a marriage and a living together had been compressed perfectly, into one summer's night...."

What transmutes the commonplace – both people and events – into the beautiful are Bond's romanticism and compassion. He romanticizes people and incidents. He looks for the good in his characters. His romanticism thus transforms a couple mating surreptitiously: "They looked very beautiful together... the woman reminded me of a panting by Titian... It was as though I had stumbled into another age... and had found lovers in a forest glade. Only a fool would have wished to disturb them. Sunil had for once in his life risen above mediocrity, and I hurried away before the magic was lost."

But it is his compassion that provides the real alchemy. He befriends grotesques like Romesh, "a deformed and ugly idiot boy;" he shelters strangers like Kamal, the epileptic hawker who hopes to pass an examination; he even feels responsible for waifs, like Madhu, in the story named after her, whom he teaches to read and write. He remembers people who have been kind, like the mother in "The Woman on Platform B" who looks after him as he waits for his train. Most of his characters are

optimistic. A good example is the paradoxical Keemat Lal, the police inspector, who, moved by compassion for the thirteen year old murderess, keeps the case pending, jeopardizing his chances of promotion, and consoles himself with the thought: “I should never have been a policeman.”

They only story in which Bond dwells on the shortcomings of a character is “Tribute to a Dead Friend.” Even here the treatment is far from harsh. In fact, Bond seldom indulges in satire. Even his caricature is kindly: “a large cauliflower – like lady, who was in the habit of bending over flower pots and holding silly little conversations with the flowers.” Bond’s remark in “The Love Potion,” “What more potent ingredients are there than love and compassion?” may well be his credo.

Bond effectively conveys compassion by writing in the first person.

Bond presents compassion, not in a sentimental form, but in the garb of humour. He uses humour to gain a number of effects. He uses it to give a person an added dimension, to suggest sentiment, to bring out the significance of an incident, to indicate meaning in the apparently meaningless or to round off a story.

Bond’s most charming quality is the beguiling simplicity of his language. A writer’s language often reveals his attitude to his subject matter. Bond’s language reveals, if anything, the honesty of his vision and the authenticity of his portrayal. He writes in a textbook English idiom and yet, because his characters are authentic, there is no question about their “Indianness”. Bond is anything but a dictionary man. In dialogue, he avoids dialect. He does not even try to convey a particular flavour by using a characteristic turn of phrase. Instead, he is content with presenting the sense and meaning of the conversation. His approach to atmosphere is similar. Instead of recreating a setting by lengthy description, Bond sketches its salient features to convey its essence. The features are unobtrusively woven into the narrative.

Ruskin Bond adds to the effect of naturalness by presenting events in chronological order, and avoiding all types of technical gimmickry, like elaborate flashback.

Bond's method of presenting character varies with the character. When dealing with types, he sketches only the typical features. Hassan, the wrestler, is created thus: "He had a magnificent build, with great wide shoulders and powerful legs." Bond suggests a man's character by dwelling on his physical features; the woman on Platform B who gives a lonely, hungry boy "tea and samosas and jalebis," has a "pale face, and dark, kind eyes," He resorts to the method of illustrating character by means of situation: the character of the woman of Dhond, in "The Desert Game", is illustrated by means of incident. Sometimes, a person's surroundings are described with the purpose of indicating his character: "Aunt Miriam's beds were usually left unmade while clothes lay draped over chairs and tables."

Thus, Bond gains his effects by not working for effect at all.

In responding to and conveying the scenic beauty of India, Bond comes closest to the British writers on India. The previous writers presented it as exotic; Bond views it as the natural background of his characters and incidents. Indian writers in English have generally ignored Indian flora. Bond evokes the hot uncomfortable nights in the plains, with their mosquitoes, bugs and lizards, with the same power with which he describes the "cool quenching relief of the monsoon," or the coming of autumn in the hills, or the beauty of the first snowfall in the mountains, or the biting cold of winter.

The settings of Bond's stories are for the most part out-of- doors: hills, open fields, ravines, distant villages. He writes frequently about waterfalls and streams and pools hidden in the jungle. He talks about giant ferns and dahlias and wild begonia, about oaks and maples and deodars. Nature is not merely a decorative background; it is a power that changes the personality of men: the struggle for survival in the desert

is difficult, consequently man and beast become hardy, as in “The Desert Game;” master and servant living in the salubrious climate of a hill-station lead a lazy life in “The Amorous Servant”. Nature is also the repository of legend as in “Listen to the Wind”; the love affair between the Englishman and the hill girl interests the writer less than the fact that every dwelling put up on Burnt Hill has been stuck down by lightning ever since the lovers were charred to death by it. Then again, the idea that there is affinity between man and nature recurs almost like a refrain in the stories: “There was no one to read to me under the mango tree again. And before I went away I had the tree torn down, because it had belonged to Madhu, and must be made to die with her.” Bond even states it rather forcefully in one story, “The Kitemaker,”: “It gladdened his heart to watch their boy at play in the winter sunshine, growing under his eyes like a young and well-nourished sapling putting forth new leaves each day. There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow at much the same pace, if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures, and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limbs in the sun, and then, with a sigh, we shed our last leaves.”

One criticism that may be leveled against Bond is that he puts too much of himself in his stories. But what else has a writer to offer but himself? And if the personality the writer presents is as engaging as Bond, we would like more of it.

b. Kewlian Sio

Kewlian Sio, the other Gentle Voice, has published a few uncollected poems and articles, and two slim volumes of short stories, *A Small World* (1960) and *Dragons* (1978). In spite of a gap of eighteen years between the two books, Sio has not changed as a writer. His concern in both the collections seems to be to recreate a delicate web of mood, feeling, colour and nostalgia. He does this by focusing on

nuance – the nuance of muted sound, colour and feeling. The characters he creates contribute to the final effect. Sio presents dreamy, sensitive children, and adults who are hardly different. In fact childhood is the central motif of the stories. Even the pleasantest memories of the adults are those of childhood.

The effect in “The Burial” depends on one such memory. The carpenter, whose mind is occupied with the details of his brother’s burial, feels his loss only when he helps a neighbour’s child to fly a kite. “My brother taught me how to fly kites, he said, ‘ in the fields at home in the evenings ... before supper ... in the evenings ... he said, and his voice broke.”

Sio relies on the colour and association of words to enrich the effects he aims at creating. He uses the adjective sparingly, relying more on the connotations of the rich, energetic verb. His language creates the impression that he is speaking rather than writing.

These stories reveal a mature writer who pays his readers the compliment of being intelligent and sensitive enough to respond to his delicate suggestions. The danger that a gentle voice runs is that it may be too soft to be heard. Neglect is the obvious corollary.

c.Murli Das Melwani

Friends have suggested that I include a critique of my own collection of short stories, *Stories of a Salesman*. Apart from the embarrassment factor, it is hard to be objective about one’s own writing. A brief, tongue-in-cheek review should give a hint about the nature of my stories.

“Murli Das Melwani is a young East Indian businessman who writes as a hobby. Well educated, he has edited a magazine. As he is by his own admission “ very much a

bachelor”, he may be unusually well qualified to write about the intrigues of the marriage market of his country, which cannot be too different, beneath the surface, from our own. It is anyway a topic that is touched on in the *Stories of a Salesman*, which are not stories with complex plots so much as sketches after the manner of Lafacadio Hearn, sharp vignettes of the daily round of average East Indian people. Let us hope that this promising writer may resurrect his partly finished novel of Indian life from the ashes of the fire that destroyed the manuscript” – William H. Archer, Tennessee Wesleyan College, writing in the July 1968 issue of *Books Abroad*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma.

Section IV

CHAPTER 4

Bhabani Bhattacharya

Bhabani Bhattacharya has published one collection of fifteen short stories as against five novels, which have been translated into over two dozen languages, including fourteen European ones. It appears that even the short stories have been written with the foreign market in mind. Exotic aspects of Indian life are dealt with. “Characters” rather than character interest Bhattacharya. Help has taken the help of psychology to explain people and events, lending even the humblest of them an air of sophistication, and making them comprehensible to the foreign reader. A dash of humour adds to the appeal. And there is economy of language which facilitates translation.

About half the stories have themes which fit in with the hackneyed image of India. There are “Pilgrims in Uniform,” journeying to see the car-festival of Jagannath, regaled by their ignorant leader on the benefits of such a pilgrimage. Even a prospective thief is converted by his eloquence. The Indian ambivalence towards superstition is again brought out in “The Quack,” who hawks “cool black powder” and even wins doubting thomases by his “fine fluent talk.” “I am no trustful ass. But... what if it happens to be otherwise this time?”

The action of “Lattu Ram’s Adventure” takes place against a colorful Indian fair. Street performers like the boy spread-eagled aloft a ten-foot pole planted in his father’s mouth are a common sight, and father and son in “Acrobats” are two poles of the eternal triangle with a slight difference. That tourist attraction, the Ajanta Caves, provide the setting for “She, Born of Light,” a romantic and pseudo-historical story.

This attitude to his material – the needs of the foreign market paramount – presumably leads the author to choose people with unusual characteristics. Ordinary

people do not appear to interest Bhattacharya. “The Faltering Pendulum” has at its centre a short-tempered eccentric rag-woman. Great Uncle, in “My Brave Great Uncle” is acquainted with the ways of ghosts and goblins and keeps them at bay with a clap of his hands. A ghost story with a touch of humour is always a sure bet, and Bhattacharya knows which horses to back. The old commuter in “Names Are Not Labels” day in day out recalls the time when buses had names, and how the change to numbers unsettled him. Another story, “Pictures in the Fire,” centres round the husband of a famous authoress who believes that he ghost-writes for his wife.

The Western mind likes to rationalize matters and perhaps would not be satisfied with portraits of mere eccentrics. Bhattacharya therefore gives a *raison d'être* for unusual behaviour. The key often lies with psychology, and the author provides a plausible explanation at the end of the story. The Brave Great Uncle is exposed when, in keeping with “Hindu custom in our Bengal villages, ” he is chosen to keep vigil for a night over a corpse, “touching the bed or bier all the while with one hand.”

As such Great Uncle can no longer clap to ward off ghosts. “He stood revealed! Sick with his morbid fear, he had been living in the protective shell of his brave yarns, himself the dramatized hero! He clapped his hands out of a wish-thought; his fear intense, the way he fought fear was no less intense.”

Investigation reveals that the old commuter has spent five years in prison, “where convicts lose their names and become numbers.” “A buried sensibility in him might have got badly bruised. And...is this talk about the bus Sankini losing its name a kind of inverted self-pity, I wonder?”

What the husband of the famous authoress indulges in is “a wish-thought and a dream,” “wishful thinking.”

We may laugh at eccentrics or sympathize with their lot. Rightly the predominant note in “Pictures” and “Names Are Not Labels” is sympathy. The Great Uncle

unfortunately invites the boaster's ridicule, and the story is written in a tongue-in-cheek manner. An undertone of humour marks other stories too.

The humour is essentially satiric in "Glory At Twilight," particularly the description of the manner in which the villagers fawn on Satyajit after he becomes rich.

"Public Figure" laughs at official life in a small town and satirizes those people who exploit a national calamity to seek the limelight. In "Lattu Ram's Adventure," twelve-year old Lattu Ram wishes to redeem himself in his elders' eyes by tracing, and humouring at considerable expense, a child he believes to be the one who is lost at the fair. Once again he realizes that he has made a fool of himself.

Apart from the situation, an attempt at humour is made in this story by listing the incorrect use of English on the signs at the fair: "Lady Shoes"; "Order suppliers promptly executed" ; "Seats of customers properly caned"; (A cane ware shop;) "hot drinks cabin."

At its best Bhattacharya's use of English as narrative has remarkable economy. He use short sentences. At times he breaks up what should be one sentence into two or three sentences. On such occasions his Indian English is neither Indian or standard English. It can only be described as Bhattacharyan English. In pursuit of quaintness, Bhattacharya uses archaic words like "affrighted" for frightened; he coins words ("A devotee, prayerful before his God..."); he compounds words ("earth-form" for the human body). Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly wonders as to what is gained when "legitimate English coinage would have served as well."

What little gain there may have been in terms of picturesqueness or vividness had these mannerisms been sparingly used is dissipated by repetition.

Bhattacharya is also guilty of violating English idiom. The author presumably means 'even for a second' when he says "lost his sure skill even for a twinkling." In

addition, Bhattacharya uses words imprecisely: “Great-Uncle became a lore in this village.” Two other elements in Bhattacharya’s experiments with syntax are ending a statement with a question mark and thus indicating that it is a question; the other is omitting the verb “to be”:

“And put to shame the fourteen generations of our forefathers in Heavenland?”

Commenting on his use of English in Bhattacharya’s novels, Meenakshi Mukherjee attributes the last two stylistic features to the influence of the Bengali language. “In Bengali the form of statement and of a question are sometimes identical, the difference being indicated in speech through tone, and through punctuation in writing. Perhaps Bhattacharya deliberately tries to recreate Bengali rhythm in English... Also Bengali sentences, unlike English or Hindi. Leave out the verb ‘to be’” (*The Twice Born Fiction*).

On the credit side, the dialogue has a note of authenticity when Bhattacharya translates Bengali speech into English:

“Your benediction is our blind man’s staff.” But it sounds outlandish when Bhattacharya imagines how his non-Bengali characters speak:

“Old Grandma, poor soul. Mad about tricky machines, stark mad! Same today as in her long-ago days, when the railroad first came this way.”

Bhattacharya’s intention rather than his achievement as an experimenter in language should be appreciated.

Evocation of atmosphere too shows unevenness. Stories like “Glory” “Great Uncle”, “The Faltering Pendulum” give authentic pictures of life in rural Bengal. “Pictures in the Fire” take us back to war-time Calcutta. The other stories describe an imaginary India.

Two stories stand out in the collection. “Mere Monkeys,” told without artifice, is a highly moving story which shows animals behaving like human being. The narrator

watches for a number of days a group of monkeys fondling the young of a grey mother-monkey. One morning a huge male intrudes upon the group, and, snatching the baby, drops it to the ground. The monkeys mourn the death of the baby in the traditional Indian manner by swaying their haunches and beating their breasts. The next day the narrator is surprised to see the mother flirting with the intruder. She coaxes him into vying with her in jumping across the mouth of a well. Suddenly she clutches him in mid-air and drags him to his death at the bottom of the well. A well-thought plan executed with finesse.

The other story, “A Moment of Eternity”, written in emotion-charged prose, describes in flashback the circumstances that lead a woman to mercy-kill her infant daughters and attempt to kill herself after her unemployed husband dies of TB.

In his stories, Bhabani Bhattacharya is very much the professional writer. He selects his material with care and arranges it into a pattern. Atmosphere, dialogue and characterization take second place to the story. The economy in ordering material is matched by economy of language. Bhattacharya’s overriding merit is that his stories are eminently readable.

Section IV

CHAPTER 4

OTHERS

a: R.de L. Furtado

Burnt Sienna bears out the fact that R. De L. Furtado knows everything about the technique of the short story, but a little less about its spirit.

There is an abundance of detail, which, though interesting in itself, does not contribute much to the final effect.

A large number of stories are didactic; intention is not sufficiently concealed by art. Furtado's satire is forced, his caricature unsure and his humour and irony are strained, as in the case of "The Good Man". Mr. Jamshed Rotivala is considered an ideal man; his routine marital duty to his wife, his obligations to his employees and his hollow heartiness to a distinguished visitor to his factory are really laid on thick. Characterization is weak in most of the stories. One relieving feature in all the stories is the presence of striking metaphors.

It is fitting that the best metaphors should have been given to a teacher of literature, in "The Vigil" as he recalls and sums up on his death bed, a life of little apparent achievement. "His voice cracked like cellophane ripped from a packed of cigarettes." "Had his life, then, been like a cactus, alone and strangely beautiful, in a wasteland of inanition." "Adrift on some ineffable gossamer of a happy thought."

The few good stories are those in which Furtado's excesses are kept in check. "The Hour of the Faun" describes a perfect day in Arjan's feline world, during which he even forgives his master for being a man!

The best story in the collection is "The Grinning Horses." It tells how little Roberto looks forward to the gaiety connected with the novena of the patron saint of the little Goanese village. But he cannot join in the fun because of his deformed leg.

His persistence forces his ayah, Juliana, to put him on the merry-go-round, but he slides off, and all the children laugh cruelly at him. Roberto imagines that even the horses are grinning at him.

The entire story is built on suggestion – the atmosphere of gaiety and festivity in the village, Juliana's affection for Roberto and his mother's anguish. The economy of language contributes to the effect of poignancy.

How we wish that Furtado had written more stories against the background he is so familiar with, a way of life he evokes with a few quick almost careless strokes.

b: Leslie de Noronha

Leslie de Noronha repeats the mistake of R. De L. Furtado. He rejects the background and characters he is familiar with and chooses to write about foreigners. A writer is free to build his stories round the places and people that make a deep impression on him. In Noronha's case we may allow that his work in hospitals as a pathologist in the U.K. and the U.S.A may have inspired him to write about foreign characters. But the irony is that Noronha's characters have their provenance not in life but in books. Noronha turned from medicine to journalism, which he studied in New York. Like a good journalist Noronha writes well. He is a faultless craftsman. He grips the reader's attention with his openings; then follow situation, problem, development and neatly tied-up ending, all done with copy book precision. His style is racy. His metaphors are striking: "her voice making little staccato stabs of sound." Atmosphere is filled in skillfully, even if a little self-consciously.

Noronha has little gift for characterization. Only Mama Strudel comes though as an individual. The others are types, particularly his foreign character. Four of his stories deal with English characters, another with a Norwegian expatriate in London, and one with an Indian who has spent the best part of his life abroad. Only four stories

are concerned with Indian characters.

Mama Strudel lifts up the story named after her by her individuality. The story depicts the depth of a mother's affection for her son. She gives up her life's dream – a retired life in her native Norway – so that her son may fulfill his ambition as an architect in America. The undertone of comedy is pleasing. The character of Mama is memorable. There is also this interesting comparison which forms the opening of the story: "They called her Mama Strudel, not because she made excellent strudel, but because of her resemblance to it' her short fat apple dumpling body and doughy arms, her merry eyes set like currant in a rosy, cheerful face with specks of flour on her nose and brown-golden braids worn in a coronet like the honey crust of pastry – all were responsible for her nickname."

The collection of Noronha's stories – the only one he has published so far – lacks the authenticity of this novel, *The Tamarind and the Mango Tree*, which is set in Goa. Because of the effort that goes as craftsmanship into these stories, we are willing to concede that they remain a good advertisement for a correspondence course in commercial story writing.

SECTION V: THE BLOSSOMING CONTINUED 1970-1980

Background

The seventies lived up to the promise of accelerating the impetus given to the Indian short story in English in the sixties. If criticism of society was one of the more marked features of the stories of the sixties, variety appears to be its hall-mark in the seventies. Hamdi Bey writes sagas about small town life and records the features of a way of life that is rapidly changing . Jug Suraiya and Vivek Adarkar deal with the young. Keki N. Daruwalla introduces locales no short story writer or novelist has used so far. Anita Desai extends the concerns of her novels to the short story – the exploration of the individual psyche. Arun Joshi pens parables of contemporary Indian life, A.D. Gorwala parables of political life. Monohar Malgonkar introduces a new subject, the army.

Variety is a healthy sign of growth. And if the trend continues, and there is every reason to believe that it will, we may expect writers to deal with a still greater number of subjects in the future. The exciting political and social events of the pre-and post-Emergency periods, not to speak of the Emergency itself, assure the writer of rich and abundant material.

Section V

CHAPTER I

PADMA HEJMADI

The outstanding writer of this period is Padma Hejmadi. She has published only one collection of stories so far, *Coigns of Vantage*. The stories appeared in prestigious magazines before they were collected in book form. Three formed part of a volume of short stories that won a Major Award for Fiction in the Jules and Avery Hopwood Contest. Most of the stories are written against the background of the joint family in South India, particularly Tamil Nadu. The theme of most of the stories is one that has so far engaged the attention of the novelist, perhaps because it is too ambitious for the short story writer. She uses her great skill to examine from various angles an old theme, the conflict in an individual who grows up under two traditions, the native and the Western.

In “Mauna” she presents the problem from the angle of tradition. The story is an almost biographical study of Grandmother, who, when alive, gave “the thrumming activity” of a joint family household and each of its members “a core of quiet”. When she moves to live with one of her grandchildren in the North she accepts the changing times with quiet grace, allowing the others the right to their beliefs. Grandmother, who symbolizes tradition, is so consistent that “when she died it was as if she completed the gesture she began when she was born. “ This story creates an awareness of a vast country sharing a common heritage.

The point of view is reversed in “Too Late for Anger”, in which the results of modernity are described. It tells about the rise and decay of a family which tried to be different and which tried to cut itself away from its roots, not with courage and conviction, but half-heartedly.

The theme of “Letter....” lies mid-way between the extremes of “Mauna” and

“Too Late”. It tells its story obliquely, in the form of a letter to a foreigner with whom the writer, a member of an orthodox joint family, had fallen in love during a visit abroad. On her return she finds that a marriage has been arranged for her. She goes to a Himalayan village with an old, faithful servant, Narayan, in order to make her decision. There she meets Tara, a nomad-girl of seven, and, impressed by her intelligence, she wants to finance Tara’s education. Tara’s mother however feels that if she is educated beyond a certain degree she will be estranged from her surroundings and her people. The narrator realizes that “one may be caught in conflicting rhythms but one goes back to one’s own: to the hurt and strength of centuries.”

The didactic element in this story is more substantial than in the others. But the excellence of the writing with its stress on romantic feeling and sharply evoked atmosphere makes us respond to “Letter...” as first and foremost a story of a spiritual quest. It also makes us overlook the fact that Tara’s mother is unconvincing either as a character or even as a type, a hill-woman. She functions only as a symbol. In a more subtle manner, Tara symbolizes the narrator’s predicament, who in a sense is a nomad also, wandering between two worlds. Narayan provides the contrast and embodies the traditional Hindu virtues.

“The Schoolmaster” and “The Uncles and the Mahatma” provide some sort of answers to the questions posed in the other stories. The latter describes the effect Gandhi’s visit has on a family and on the population of a small town. The arrangements that are made to receive him give the author scope for character-painting and a little domestic comedy. The inevitable grandmother in her wisdom anticipates the influence of Gandhi: “not to expect great upheavals – just little changes, perhaps in attitudes, perhaps in actions.” Everybody changes a little. A distant cousin even threatens to use the weapon of a fast to make her parents agree to her marriage to Youngest Uncle!

It is perhaps significant that this story closes the collection. Has Padma Hejmadi found her answers in the philosophy of Gandhi, a synthesis between East and West, the old and the new, in moral not social transformation?

I

Padma Hejmadi's treatment differs from story to story. It is romantic, ironical, serious, comic, even satirical according to the nature of the story, though an undertone of humour and pathos is never absent in her work. It recalls a cultivated, graceful voice entralling its listeners in a tastefully decorated drawing room. The subtler the modulations of voice, the deeper the impact of the variation. For instance, the satire against the emancipated Kirit girls with their upstartish fisher-folk origins in "Too Late For Anger" borders almost on the savage precisely because it is so controlled.

The narrator's voice gives Hejmadi's stories the character of a tale (The difference between a story and a tale being one between the written and the spoken word). Just as the oral story is replete with asides, minor digressions, insertions and comments, so too in Hejmadi's stories we find, revolving round the central theme, thumb-nail sketches of minor characters, a legend or two behind a local institution, detailed reminiscences, and some interesting episodes. Since Hejmadi has to blend all these diverse elements, the pace of her stories is slow and leisurely, despite which Hejmadi holds the reader's attention.

One of the ways in which she does this is to give her stories a striking opening. It may be clever, as in "Too Late", or full of expectation, as in "The Schoolmaster", or humorous, as in "Dr Salaam", or it may be concise, summing up the theme of the story, as in "Home-coming".

The abundance of detail serves, as in an oral story, another purpose too. It helps to create the atmosphere of a crowded and pulsating joint family. In less expert hands this mass of material would prove unwieldy. Hejmadi weaves it skillfully, not simply

into the texture of the story; somehow it becomes the story itself. Each story has a central motif to which everything else conforms. Thus, in “Mauna” an entire lifetime, Grandmother’s, the reactions of ten distinct and innumerable undefined characters (even a novel may have less) are recorded. And a succession of incidents and episodes are threaded round Grandmother’s practice of mauna (the religious vow of silence for a specified period).

Set beside the central motif are a large number of minor motifs which blend into it or make it stand out. “The Schoolmaster” provides a good illustration of this practice. The Middle School – symbolical of modernity – in the midst of the old, orthodox village, is the central motif. The pattern is repeated in miniature in the zamindar’s house: the zamindar is a kindly old soul with spiritual inclinations, his son is addicted to cocktail parties. It is repeated in the Patel family: the old man runs a theatre in the village, while his two sons study in the city. The motif meets in the person of the schoolmaster. He combines the two outlooks: “They had some classes out in the mango grove, which roused the disapproval of the elders in the village; they put on plays and dramatized stories from the ancient puranas, which mollified those who had disapproved.”

Apart from the motif, major and minor, each detail, each description is not only relevant to the theme – the prime requirement of the short story – but is related to other strands in the story so that it gives the feeling of a closely interwoven whole. The craftsmanship and finish of a Padma Hejmadi story reminds us of an exquisitely embroidered Kashmir shawl. Her stories are crossed through with meanings which give them, like a shawl, a multi-shaded shot effect. It is this knack of relating things to one another that saves Hejmadi from the charge of window-dressing for the foreign reader, as in this random example: “A tara is a star and she does have a curiously star-like quality; a clear rare sparkle that seems to acquire a deeper, more

unexpected loveliness in this remote mountain village,”

Padma Hejmadi varies the presentation of character according to the nature of the story and the importance of the character. In a story like “Appa-Mam”, which gives a portrait of an unlikely sanyasi, the character is described as well as shown in action. So is Grandmother in “Mauna”. The approach is different in the case of the schoolmaster; he is presented indirectly, through the eyes of others. This is also the approach in “Home-coming” and “Dr Salaam”. In “Too Late” satire and caricature are the means of characterization. As for the minor characters, they are either summed up briefly or one prominent aspect of their personality is focused sharply. In some stories this aspect is accentuated and the minor characters are presented as mere caricatures. The zamindar in “The Schoolmaster” is described as “an absent-minded old soul who spends most of this time looking up and down the country for the right guru.”

As a stylist, Padma Hejamadi chooses her words carefully. The words are not only precise but also colourful. Her language can be highly pictorial when it seeks to translate the responses of the eye: “All of a sudden the days grew hotter; jacarandas gave way to tumbling yellow cassias squandering their petals down our dusty roads, and then to the massed scarlet of gulmohurs”

In some parts the stories move forward in a series of images. Some of her descriptions are highly sensuous. The following sentence suggests music, besides being musical: “.. as we danced and slithered down the hill the stars entangled in our hair, the sea our very anklet.”

Hejmadi’s metaphors are highly decorative, but they seldom help to move the story forward as for instance those of Manjari Isvaran’s or Bunny Reuben’s do. “Hair the colour of a ripe badami mango.”

These devices are not used at random but inserted carefully to add variety and hold the reader’s attention with intelligent variation. In this way Padma Hejmadi

combines the craftsmanship and skill of a commercial writer with the sensitivity of a creative artist.

Most of Hejmadi's stories have an epic sweep. The joint family, with its teeming households the variety of incidents and the innumerable cross-relationships, is one factor which suggests a broad canvas. Another is the author's awareness of "four thousand years of tradition." A third is the range of her backgrounds which extend from a Himalayan village to a city in the Deccan where the Buddhist past exists with the Muslim present and take in their sweep the length and breadth of the country. Yet another reason is her practice of choosing a comparatively minor character as a narrator, thus giving a family or a character or a sequence of events a magnitude and perspective which would be lacking otherwise. The stories make an unforgettable impact because Padma Hejmadi is a mature writer with, what is more important, a vision of India as an ancient and a great country.

Section V

CHAPTER 2

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

In 1970 a policeman published a collection of poems with the title *Under Orion*; the pleasant part of the event was that the poems were very good. Keki N. Daruwalla repeated the feat in 1978 in another genre, the short story.

Daruwalla's aim as a short story writer is best expressed in his own words: "I have never looked at the short story as merely a slice of life. It has to be sustained by an inner meaning. Even as it reflects reality it changes it by a mathematics of concave mirrors. Hence my excursions into the surreal and the symbolic. The surreal after all, exists on the dark peripheries of reality, only it warps the sequential logic of our everyday lives and tears the truth out of the heart, as it were."

In Daruwalla's case the short story seems to have appropriated themes more suited to the multi-faceted suggestiveness of modern poetry. The treatment, too, recalls poetry. Most of the stories are carried forward by means of images rather than by chronological narrative. And, as if to stress that a modern sensibility is at work, the total effect of Daruwalla's surreal and symbolical stories (as distinct from his other stories) is that of a modern painting. The collage of images, narrative and dialogue recalls the modern painter's haphazardly arranged colours which convey his view of reality. "The Tree" exemplifies Daruwalla's approach and the technique employed in the surreal stories.

"The Tree" opens with the arrival of the man's wife in the village seeking directions to the tree under which he sat for years and finally "merged into". When the tree is pointed out to her, she recognizes her husband in its form. "The cleft stem that erupted from the ground seemed to be almost shaped after his legs, the same bulging calves, and the two knotted protuberances that stood for his ankles."

As she stares at the tree she breaks into a semi-confessional monologue which reveals how she waited five years for this return. The monologue is replaced by narrative which relates briefly the period during which she lived with a stranger, till the time she heard of her husband's death. Then she started for the village. This is the last we hear of the woman. Few writers would introduce a person who appears to be the chief or angle character and suddenly drop him halfway. The rest of the story is a recreation of the period of the man's arrival and sojourn, conveyed from the point of view of the villagers. Narrative suddenly slips into reportage as the reader is told about the natural causes which led to the creation of the swamp where the tree stands.

There is then a shift to the period of the man's stay under the dying tree, and the reader is given an idea of the sort of man he was. The mystical aspect of his personality is suggested by means of a surreal symbol. "He had clambered up the tree of terror and laughed so uproariously that the tree shook and shivered with his laughter and the cones had fallen, plop, plop, plop on the ground and nothing had happened to him." (The biblical allusion should be noted also.)

At this point the narrative is replaced by images which convey the passage of time and suggest at the same time the man's growing awareness of reality. The writing becomes impressionistic. "December: brown bush stripped of brown leaf; taurus, the bull, raging through the skies, the screech and cackle of water fowl at dawn,"

The two concluding paragraphs describe the spreading out of his consciousness and his merger with the tree. The last sentence of the story is: "His dying an event of non-motion, of silence."

What are we to make of this Kafkaesque story? A spoof on mysticism? A parody of affected and obscure writing? A parable of mental disintegration and physical rot? A fable of sloth? A fictional rendering of the Hindu belief of the atman merging with the Atman?

What are we to make of its pastiche narrative, its amalgam of styles? The sudden withdrawal and introduction of characters? The changes in the directions of the story line? The roots of the story in reality, its branches in another dimension? The presence side by side of concrete and abstract images? Is the writer a novice who is not sure of his aims?

Yet, inspite of all these doubts, the disparate elements seem to coalesce. And, in the process, the story achieves a distinct personality. It passes the ultimate test of the short story; it has unity of effect. We could of course try and rework this and any of the other stories, but somehow the flavour and impact of the result would be different.

By and large these remarks apply to six of the fifteen stories in the collection, “Shaman,” “The Dwarf Deer,” “The Pebble-heap,” “Scarecrow,” “Death of a Bird Lover,” “The Case of the Black Ambassador.”

Among the surreal stories, the mythical element is most pronounced in “The Pebble-heap.” This story skillfully retells, with all the paraphernalia of symbol and image and liberal doses of sarcastic wit, the well-known Hindu tale of the sadhu who kept a count with the help of pebbles of the clients who visited a whore. She goes to swarga because “her dharma lay in giving pleasure to people.” The sadhu is reborn as a cur because all he did was to record the sins of others. But the pebble-heap helps to save him from the contaminating touch of a group of chandals downstream by pulling him straightaway to a watery grave!

The stories in this group gain their effects by the use and variation of images. In “The Tree,” for example, the swamp, which has suggestions of sluggishness and inertia, seems an appropriated background for the man, The basic suggestion is enforced by stray images of stagnation and decay; “months crunched past like dry leaves”; “time turned to fungus on his eyebrows”; “his imagination a necklace of cockroaches.” In “The Pebble-heap” the cycles of passion in the man who is supposed

to have overcome it are reflected in nature. The sadhu, shortly after his renunciation, is at peace, and the “sun lazed around like a water buffalo.” When he has a prescient dream of his end, and is enraged by a feeling of having been cheated, “the sun (is) a lion raging though the forest of the skies.” When the sadhu dies and nature resumes its indifference, “the sun hung around like a wet shrimp.”

Side by side with the use of imagery to reinforce a theme, give depth to a story or suggest an over-all pattern, is the use of individual images as pleasing elements of decoration. As is to be expected of a poet, these are sharp and beautiful. The fog comes “low like crane flight”; “At dusk the birds poured from the grey spur of the sky.” Daruwala coins precise and appealing words. The sky is “gruel-grey” or it turns “gull-grey.” He speaks of “corrugated clouds” and “patches of cloud overlapping like fish scales.” Again and again strong visual effects are unobtrusively squeezed into the narrative. “Irfan stayed put watching the grass on the left bank turning into a hedge of black bristles. Line and colour dissolving into one universal black.” In addition to these, we are struck by the brilliance of individual sentences.

It is therefore all the more surprising to come across examples of careless writing. Sometimes metaphors get mixed inextricably. “A painful truth which has not dawned on the mind as yet but is lurking nearby, is similarly swaddled in lint and gauze. At night the dreams cushion it with a smile. “ Sometimes they are far fetched. There are also instances of loose writing. The presence of American words in the midst of predominantly standard English strikes a disconcerting note, (words like “hollering” and “greener” presumably for “gun”). In a story like “The Dwarf-deer” the basic symbolism appears laboured. The juxtaposition of numerous styles sometimes hinders the flow of the narrative. The unexpected appearance of a first person narrator towards the middle of “The Pebble-heap”, and his equally swift disappearance, does not serve the intended purpose of providing a perspective. Indeed the effect is jarring.

In its weaker moments, Daruwalla's writing is self-conscious. It attracts attention to itself and stands as a barrier between the reader and the story.

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Daruwalla's writing in the other nine stories is more straight forward. In these the events are episodic and the narrative is more or less chronological. History, local myths, legends, traditional wisdom and superstitions go into the making of stories like "Shaman," "The Bandit Comes Home," "Love Across the Desert," "Sword & Abyss." In fact, the opening of "Shaman" sounds like the incantation of a local story teller or the prelude to a folk tale of the area.

"Glory to the bell-god Ghantakaran who kept the flocks safe! Glory to Kagbhusand, the crow-god who fought and drove away Vishnu from the valley of the Dhauli Ganga! Glory to the Rawal of Badrinath and the Lamas of Tholing! Glory to the wind-gods at the passes, to the stone-gods in the avalanche zones and the river-gods when one crossed these mountain-torrents barefoot, shoes tucked into one's armpits, And most of all, glory to the Dzong-Pong (a Tibetan official) living across the border who threw open the valley for trade."

"The Bandit Comes Home" seems to record the irony of history; it tells how "a torch of a woman", humiliated for being married into a family of bandits, set fire to herself which the loo spread across the village, so that the village of Ajrara, called ujar after the Maharattas razed it to the ground, was restored to its former state. "Love Across the desert" does the exact opposite of this story; it records the events that go into the making of myths. Love traces the courage of Najab Hussain who defies the elements, village authority and the border police of two nations to bring home a bride whose arrival ends three years of drought.

The episodic stories convey a strong sense of place. "Love" captures the stark rugged beauty of the Rann of Kutch with its mirages and undulating sands, while

“Shaman” recreates the scene of a mountain village clinging to snow-clad ridges on the Indo-Tibetan border.

This feel for locale is evident even in the surreal stories. In fact, the surreal stories have a strong base in reality. Thus, the locale of “The Tree” and “The Idol-theft” is hilly Garhwal. The setting of “The Pebble-heap” (why does Daruwalla hyphenate his titles?) is the bank of a holy river. Ajrara is located close to Delhi.

In fact, next to language it is the sense of place that leaves the strongest impression on the reader. It is perhaps inescapable that this impression can be created by a plethora of detail, local colour, generous references to the customs of the area and the presence of untranslatable words like “khor”, “bhungis”, “chagals” and others. Where the details are incidental it is pleasing and seems part of the fabric of the story. Where the stories have grown out of the locales instead of the locales growing into the stories, such as “Love” and “Shaman”, the details acquire all the unhealthy connotations of the term documentary.

On the whole, however, these backgrounds do not serve a merely decorative function. They often determine the outlook and behaviour of the characters. In this way the settings are an integral part of the stories. This point is strongly brought out by a story like “The Healing Touch.” An America-based doctor, a lohar by caste, cures the stubborn carbuncles of his host’s wife at a party by pressing them with a heated iron bracelet. Since one carbuncle is located far down on the spine, Sudhir has to unhook her blouse in the presence of the guests. The next morning Sudhir’s wife is invited by the host’s wife ostensibly to see an electrical gadget. She is taken to another house where there is no sign of the host’s wife and he does nothing but talk to her in a tone of deferential mockery.

“Well, you can’t expect someone to disrobe my wife in public and get away with it, do you? And those people sitting outside....(think)... that you are sleeping with

me.’

“Even as she wept bitterly she realized that the entire episode hinged on appearance. Here was the middle class killing itself in its endless quest for propriety, a society trying desperately to safeguard itself from the truth. The host last evening could not have said a sharp word to Sudhir. But this morning he had to humiliate the wife.”

This is one of a number of stories which are authentically Indian. It shows how the much-asked question, “What is Indianness?” could be answered. The events in this story could have taken place only in India. The other stories in this collection which possess this quality are “The pebble-heap” and: ”Sword and Abyss.”

Although settings determine character in most stories, there is one type of personality which occurs in stories as diverse as “Shaman”, “The Case of the Black Ambassador” and “Death of a Bird-lover.” Daruwalla is fond of the person with prescience. In stories with such characters future events occur in the present, in a manner reminiscent of J.B.Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls*. In “Shaman”, for instance, Kartikey, who is descended from a family of shamans, lives up to his ancestral reputation by seeing, on his wedding day, the course of his married life, and embarks on it with open eyes. In “The Case of the Black Ambassador,” Gauri Shankar fills the columns of his weekly paper with stories of gruesome murders and rapes, which begin to take place even as he is on trial. He is acquitted. We wonder whether he foresaw the ills of society or gave society the idea for them.

Daruwalla perhaps uses the prescient character as a device to create the surreal atmosphere of his stories. In other words, the character exists for the sake of the story, not vice versa. This fact partly helps to account for Daruwala’s somewhat limited range of characterization.

No reader can miss the range of humour in Daruwala’s stories. Sardonic wit is the

yeast that creates the character of the bird lover through monologue. Satire is used to sketch the typical village elders who set themselves up as judges in “Sword and Abyss.” Irony and farce mingle in the story of the skeptical lecturer who comes to pray for a son, steals an idol and ends the bargain by begetting twin boys. Humour stretches into caricature in “How the Quit India Movement Came to Alipur”, particularly in the presentation of the “mushroom politicians” and the collector, Dave Fowler. “Once he was discharged and taken into the Civil Service after the War, he thought that whiskers were out of place. The ICS did not deserve them!”

The play of imagination, the unusual themes, the vivid language, the variety of narrative forms and the use of locales few other writers have used, all make Daruwalla one of a kind.

Section V

CHAPTER 3

ANITA DESAI

Anita Desai brought out five novels before she presented a collection of short stories. *Games At Twilight*. When *Cry, the Peacock* was published one had the impression that the author had a number of short stories tucked away in her file. In other words, a short story writer had presented a novel. The technique and the approach in *Cry* is that of a short story, apart from the subject, which concerns the inner landscape of the mind and the heart of a high-strung woman. Instead of the anticipated collection of short stories came a second novel, *Voices in the City*, its canvas of personal suffering and the outer landscape broader by comparison. *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, dealing with Indian immigrants in England, was followed by *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, which seemed to re-work the theme of the first novel in a broader context. Her fifth novel, *Fire On The Mountain*, tracing the interaction between a withdrawn old woman and her equally withdrawn great-granddaughter, won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1978. The eleven stories in *Games At Twilight*, published almost simultaneously with *Fire*, parallel the changes in style, narrative technique and growing interest in the outer world noticeable in the succeeding novels.

Basically, unlike other writers, there is no difference between Anita Desai the novelist and Anita Deasi the short story writer. There is no divergence between the manner and the matter. In fact, the manner is the matter.

It is for this reason that, more than any other writer's, it is easy to summarize Anita Desai's short stories. The outward action, the development, complication, or whatever we may call it, from the opening to the end of the story, is almost that delight of the advertising copywriter's, the one-sentence capsule. Thus, the title story describes how little Ravi realizes his insignificance as he learns that his absence from

the games is hardly noticed and his presence is regarded an intrusion. “Private Tuition by Mr. Bose” draws the portrait of a timid man, who struggling through sessions of tuition to unresponsive and supercilious students, is happy to return to the domestic company of his wife and infant son. In “Surface Textures” a Petty Clerk is led to the core of things by the beauty and variety of reality. A student, in “Studies in the Park” escapes the chaos in his crowded home, studies for his examinations in the park and gets an insight into the purpose of life when he sees a beautiful woman dying slowly. “The Farewell Party” and “A Devoted Son” describe what the titles promise: a farewell party for a petty boxwallah couple; a son who despite his academic and professional brilliance humbly serves his father all along.

These summaries, hindered by titles like copywriters’ slogans, can hardly convey the experience of the stories. The narrative swiftly entangles the reader in the web of the characters’ thoughts, reactions and moods and moves with spidery suddenness – and sureness – from one feeling to another. The title story is a good illustration of her art.

The claustrophobia of the children kept indoors during the blisteringly hot afternoon, with which “Games at Twilight” opens, provides the contrasting build-up to the freedom in the open. Another contrast is provided by the state of vegetable and animal life, somnolent and drooping now, perk and energetic in the evening. It is against this background that the children begin their play. Through the mirth and the movement the focus comes to rest on Ravi, who feeling himself exposed and in danger of being caught, slips into a disused shed stocked with old furniture. Once inside, he is assaulted by the smell of rats, ant-hills, dust, spider webs and “less recognizable horrors”. His mind takes over, and his physical and emotional reaction to his fear is described vividly. As time passes, he imagines the routine of life outside – the parents sitting on cane chairs in the garden and the gardener watering the parched

earth. He endures the discomfort and the fears so that he alone will remain unconquered. When he does dash out he realizes that the children have moved on to other games and his attempts to join the current game are thwarted.

As this story shows, one of Anita Desai's devices of gaining her effects is by means of a subtle variation and contrast of colours, sounds and moods, almost like a musician working the mysteries of the scale.

This is done with the use of words charged with colour and association, and sentences strung out with vivid clauses. Words come easily to Anita Desai. They cascade like pearls from her pen, catching, reflecting the sensuous, porous beauty around her. Movement and precision combine in her descriptions, as in this example: "Then, perhaps roused by the shrieks of the children, a band of parrots suddenly fell out of the eucalyptus tree, tumbled frantically in the still, sizzling air, then sorted themselves out into battle formation and streaked away across the white sky. "A phrase like "sorted themselves into battle formations" gives a clue to Anita Desai's humour. She is not interested in social comedy or in an individual's foibles. She does not juggle with words for comic effect. Her humour appears to be almost incidental. She seems to be concerned with humorous situations, traits, actions and words only so far as they help to enrich atmosphere or round off personality. For Anita Desai humour is a dimension of experience.

The humor, however, is more prominent in those stories in which the characters are observed externally rather than allowed to develop from the inside. Otiima Basu is one such character. She is supposed to read out the newspaper to her ailing husband, but no sooner does she read a headline than she sets out "along a train of thought of her own", regaling Mr. Basu with a commentary of her own, so that, in the end, Mr. Basu is left irritated and the paper unread. Only occasionally is Anita Desai's humour as flashy as in this example: "Then he looked away from me, took his watch out of his

packet and enquired, 'Is the food ready?' in a voice that came out of his nose like the whistle of a punctual train." ("Studies in the Park")

Anita Desai's use of symbolism and imagery is as subtle and subdued as her use of humour. At its simplest it takes the form of a symbol which represents the protagonist or his desire. The unreal flowers and birds painted by the artist in "Sale" testify as much to his creative imagination as to his impracticality (stressed by the anxiety of his wife as she expectantly watches the potential buyers.) The pineapple cake, in the story called after it, which is denied to little Victor and gorged down by his mother, is as much a symbol of Victor's frustrated hopes as it is of his mother's grossness.

At its most complex, Anita Desai's symbolism extends to a double image. In

"Pigeons at Daybreak", the parrot in the cage symbolizes its asthmatic owner, wracked by a disease he cannot cure, married to a delightfully (for the reader only) self-willed woman, confined in a stifling flat in a stifling city, longing for the freedom of the pigeons, who belong to the city and yet are not of it. Similarly, in "Scholar and Gipsy", the Hindu temple in the hills in which Pat discovers Buddha while David scoffs at the very notion becomes the symbol of moral blindness for one and of enlightenment for the other.

Not all the stories, however, exhibit the same intensity of atmosphere and complexity of style as "The Games at Twilight", "Private Tuition by Mr. Bose," or "The Farewell Party". In fact, the stories draw the same graph as the novels, a movement away from luxuriance towards a sinewy economy.

Atmosphere is not a static quality with Anita Desai. Since her stories are a record of the characters' reactions to their surroundings, there is constant interaction between the inner and the outer landscape. We observe how, in the following extract, the nature of the description changes as the action moves inwards: "Through the crack

Ravi saw the long purple shadows of the shed on the garage lying still across the yard. Beyond that, the white walls of the house. The bougainvillea had lost its lividity, hung in dark bundles that quaked and twittered and seethed with masses of homing sparrows. The lawn was shut off from his view. Could he hear the children's voices? It seemed to him that he could. It seemed to him that he could hear them chanting singing, laughing. But what about the game?"

Although atmosphere forms such a strong presence in these stories yet its *raison d'être* is the individual, or the personality it interacts with, illuminates, shapes, creates. Anita Desai's first concern is the individual.

Yet, ironically, she does not present a very wide character gallery. She is attracted towards certain types only. She excels at portraying the lonely, the sensitive, the shy individual, alienated and introverted. Ravi is a child to whom "nothing more wonderful had ever happened.... than being taken out by an uncle and bought a whole slab of chocolate all to himself." Timorous Mr. Bose's most positive action does not go beyond the merely theoretical. "As often as Mr. Bose longed to alter the entire direction of the world's revolution, as often as he longed to break the world apart into two halves and shake out of them – what? festival fireworks, a woman's soft hair, blood-stained feathers? – he would shudder and pale at the thought of his discretion, his violence, this secret force that now and then threatened, clamoured, so that he had quickly to still it, squash it." The painter in "Sale" expresses his personality by blending colours that do not exist and painting forms that distantly resemble flowers and birds. Anita Desai reassures the reader of his basic humanity when she makes him say "Listen! Do you hear my birds? He raises his hand and, with its gesture, ushers in the evening voices of children uttering those cries peculiar to the time of parting."

As with language and humour, so too with characterization. Observation and external study gradually replaces development from the inside. Suno, in "Studies," is

a sort of link figure between the two types. Suno's journey from a student's tension to a hippie sort of detachment is credible, as is Harish's lapse in "Surface Textures" into silence. Harish's metamorphosis is traced, not by roving across the inner landscape, but by its opposite, by noting the cumulative effect of external reality on him. Both the internal and external forms of characterization combine in the delineation of David and Pat in "Scholar and Gipsy".

Ultimately the stories appeal because of the force of the narrative. Some have the additional merit of dealing with unusual situations. "The Devoted Son", for example, reverses the stereotype; it is a father who rebels against his son's life-long devotion to him. The best story in the collection, and the most representative of her art, is "The Farewell Party". It might appear strange that we have made no reference to it so far. The reason is that its various elements are held together in such a fine balance and the emotions it arouses are so tangled that the experience it yields can only be enjoyed, not discussed. To dissect it would be to dismember a centipede to find out how it moves. Which may indeed, with qualifications, be the verdict on all her stories.

Section V

CHAPTER 4

HAMDI BEY

In a sense Hamdi Bey's stories are similar to Padma Hejmadi's in theme: they talk about two ways of living. But unlike Hejmadi, Bey does not contrast the past with the present. He talks about the past and the passing; his purpose is 'to evoke Small Town's transition from feudalism to a kind of modernity.' Whereas Hejamdi takes the whole country in an epic sweep, Bey finds his epics in his bit of ivory two inches wide. Eleven of the twenty three stories in *Small Town Stories*, are set against one background, Small Town, and three others against the rural outskirts of Small Town. The stories set against Small Town are drawn on a broad canvas. Each story is concerned with a number of incidents. Minor characters, often only names, flit in and out of them for no other reason than to suggest the largeness of the canvas.

What the broad canvas brings alive is not merely a pattern of life, for a pattern is something external and obvious. It brings alive a way of behaving, believing and thinking of a people who inhabit a particular region of India. Each story strikes us as authentic. It appears so perhaps because it is blatantly regional. The authenticity does not appear to be the highlighting of a few details or the presence of local colour. In fact, the narration is nothing if not detached and objective. Indeed, the tone borders almost on reportage. The authenticity comes from the mature mind behind the pen.

Many are the memories Small Town treasures. As the dedication to "the smalltownner" says, "still nostalgic about the feudal order, recalling only its fidelities and ignoring its perfidies." There is the memory, unpleasant to some, cherished by others, of Tughril Shah, a governor under Babar, who caused a married woman he fancied to immolate herself. This memory casts its shadow across the love of two of their descendants. A local tomb is associated with the legend of a young girl who

jilted her rustic admirer to enter the Nawab's harem for a ridiculously small quantity of Gujarati cardamom. "The Ganga has eroded both above and below but spared the tomb, probably because the river is still young and beautiful."

More recent than this is the memory of Chhapan Chhuri, the girl-bride who was stabbed fifty six times by her husband because she was beautiful. Driven out of her home and subjected to all sorts of humiliation, she made good as a dancer, supported her husband's family and paid for the prolonged litigation which beggared him. Local landmarks recall a flood during which neighbours bivouacking in the town-hall verandah failed to shed their age-long enmity; in fact rejoiced by turning on a gramophone when they heard the collapsing of a neighbour's home.

"The Four Men of Small Town" marks one aspect of the transition to the present. It tells how three landowners by pursuing expensive hobbies – cars, photography, drink – provide the town with its first taxi driver, petty photographer and shopkeeper, while a fourth, indulging his passion for food, fails to become a chef. Contrasting with their fortunes is the rise of the "professional" who adds, "like the successive lobes of a growing fungus, a flour mill, an oil mill and a sugar factory to his workshop". The professional becomes an "ugly engineer" in the story named after him, when he has to build a bridge which will link the industrialized right bank with the feudal left bank. "The Litter" and "From One to Another" reveal that Small Town now belongs squarely to the present. Mr. Sasadhar Bose, in "The Litter" is proud of his inherited wealth, judges everything by its price and is discomfited when his daughter brings home a pariah litter on the day that a school-mate, a film director, visits him. In "From One to Another", an old woman finds an outlet for her envy by disfiguring her pretty niece with hot oil. In this story, Small Town is presented as it is today, dirty, dusty, crowded, indistinguishable from any other town in Bihar or U.P.State

Technique helps Hamdi Bey to give his stories an epic effect. The narrator takes on the role of a chronicler and tries to reconstruct his subject from various angles. In the true spirit of research, he checks and re-checks information obtained from various sources. This, on the surface, may appear to be an artless manner of writing a story, but it is a studiedly artless method calling for skill of a high degree. Add to this the mock-humility of the chronicler, and a dash of humour, and you have a beguiling account. “Tincowrie Daktar” is representative of Bey’s technique.

Bey reconstructs Tincowrie’s career and personality by examining and sifting the legends current about him, the opinion of his detractors, the historical association of landmarks and the Lutheran Mission Journal which preserves the diaries of the pastors who recorded changes in Tincowrie’s nature.

Unfortunately, not all the stories reveal this degree of sophistication. “Raja’s Procession” which describes the exhibition the Raja of Ranjha holds to celebrate his deflowering of the five-hundredth virgin, is lumpy. The story could have opened with the procession which precedes the inauguration of the exhibition, and the factors which led the Raja to indulge this whim could then have been explained. “Leila’s Envy” rambles on with some point but little punch.

In the *Continent of Circe*. Nirad Chaudhuri comments, “Indian writers are faced by a problem of writing for which they have neither the knowledge nor the strength of mind, The life, the mind and the behaviour of Indians are so strange for the people of the West that if these are described in ordinary English the books would be unintelligible to English-speaking readers.” This charge cannot be made against Hamdi Bey because he has fashioned an adequate Western idiom to express his experience. Not only is his writing devoid of verbal or linguistic gymnastics; it works well within its ordinariness. His writing is as clear-sighted as the “Nawab, who looked

at the tall pale girl from his jharoka and stroked his beard and knew that it was grey". Hamdi Bey knows what effect he wished to achieve, and he does it in a quiet unobtrusive manner. He uses Indian words, not only in dialogue but also in the narrative, in an unself-conscious manner. "He said that as he turned the roasting satlu littis on the brushwood fire in the chulha dug in the earth." The exactness of "brushwood fire apart, the word "chula" connotes something that its synonym "fire place" can never do. We cannot fail to notice that Bey does not italicize Indian words as most other writers in their self-consciousness do.

Bey's language can be expressive within its apparent ordinariness. "Between us was the snipe's blood, like a red rupee on the ground but still moist enough to hold a boll of the dead bird's down against the persistent dismembering wind." "The mornings are hung with curtains of mist over muslin-thin sheets of dew on the turf." Metaphors, which in Bey's hands are illuminating, decorative and illustrative, enhance this expressiveness. Bey's moon is "tender as a halo," "a strong breeze chases waves in the paddy and plumed grass;" hope sparkles like "lightening in the Kohl-clouded eyelashes of a woman"; "the night-latch clicked like a tongue in a soured mouth" (about a disappointed caller leaving); "youth held a firm grip over her figure and gait, tightening its grasp on her thin waist and form that constriction pressing out her femininity into rather ample bosom and hips."

Under-statement, which is the chief characteristic of Bey's language, adds sparkle to his wit. "The Buddha seems to have preferred the westward detour to Sarnath and the eastward to Vaisali and Amballi's hospitality, probably to save himself an extra river crossing." It gives an edge to his satire: "The cattle-dust hour is one of the staples of bad poetry for the dust of the fair never reached the ivory tower of the poet." It makes his irony more devastating: "The pious wife of a trader rebuilt it and put goldfish in its pond and a marble tablet to her own act of piety." Wit turns into

sarcasm in “Fifty Six Knives”.

But in his effort to achieve precision, Bey neglects euphony. The sentence, “she was jealous of them and fought back from the hut her father, has a more pleasing ring if written ”she was jealous of them and fought back her father from her hut”.

Bey reminds one of the British writers who wrote about India in respect of his knowledge of and love for the fauna and flora of this country. Outdoor life is important as background in a large number of stories. It also provides him with pleasing metaphors. In one story, “An Average Woman,” nature becomes a distinct influence on personality.

In two stories Bey has made sustained experiments with language. The narrators in both stories are Adivasi converts to Catholicism, who speak and think in a type of English which combines sophisticated phrases with a clipped, at times ungrammatical, colloquialism. Yet this language does not ring false, because it has its roots in real life.

“Across the Tiger Pass” describes the conversation and thoughts of Cordelia and Ignès as they journey from their remote village to Ranchi town to marry each other. The language succeeds in conveying the ambivalence of these people to local superstitions and to their new religion. They suffer the confusing and contradictory pulls of traditional morality and newly imposed morals; their hopes mingle with their fears and prejudices. The following extract gives some idea of the original.

“I love the big world not this little shelf of a village which may any night topple down into the hole of the valley and where all that happens is calamity – somebody bit by a snake, another a leopard strike or a tiger kill, a third a pig gore and the fourth the fever take away.”

‘Your will like Father Brewick,’ Ignès say to placate her. ‘I will not know him. Father are not what they were, not even Sebchian, and I have turn to the old rite.

When Francis die I take a stump of the wist-tree, daub vermillion for the eye and the nose, and kill a cock and squirt blood from its cut neck on the wood, and then lace the wood in its entrail and I did throw the whole lot in the sacred grove,’

“ ‘You did that you go to marry me?’ Ignés ask in terror.

“ ‘It is Francis really to blame. Francis who lie below the tiger paw, his blood splash in the bush and his entrails the sport of vulture. He had to avenge himself on his enemy who led him up to the tiger and I was the only one near to him to do the vengeance rite. I did as Birsa hate him too. But it had to be done. Custom cry for it. I have Francis though he save me once.’

“He was quick with the axe and when the leopard seize my arm he sever its head with one blow.’ Ignés look at the scar on his arm and his face become purple.”

The language in these two stories is as expressive and as pliant as in the others. “A part of a tree fly out on the wing of a green parrot flock.” “Huge black boulder tumble on each other like sheep in a pen and slab flake out from sunburnt stone as scab on a sore. Between one boulder and another sprout one or two thin tree,”

Bey handles a complex subject, a split personality, in pidgin English in “Up the Zizyphus Tree.”

Hamdi Bey’s experiments with English give one the feeling that when the use of Indian English becomes widespread there will be no such thing as standard Indian English but multifarious varieties of Indian English depending on the region in which they are written and on the people who write them. For the time being his use of language can serve as one among a number of models for those who wish to experiment with English.

Section V

CHAPTER 5

THE VOICES OF YOUTH

For the first time, in the seventies, we come across collections of short stories in which adolescents or the young are the main characters in almost all the stories. This is so in the collections of Jug Suraiya and Vivek Adarkar. Four of the five stories in Suraiya's *The Interview And Other Stories* are concerned with men and women in their early twenties. All the seven stories in Adarkar's collection *We Could Be Happy Together* deal with teenagers. Both Suraiya and Adarkar, themselves youthful voices, are also the voices of youth.

(a) Jug Suraiya

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Command over language is the first impression that Jug Suraiya's stories make on a reader. Suraiya's observation is keen, he pays attention to minute detail, his descriptions are vivid, His chief weapon is the forceful verb; we find him again and again securing immediacy of feeling, colour and action with it: "blouse crimped into the waistline"; "the thrumming ceiling fan fluffed the papers on his desk and he moved a glass paper weight onto the fluttering edges"; "he tilted with these huge, road spanning adversaries with quixotic zeal, holding collision course till the last, eye-widening moment and then spinning off onto the dirt track beside the road with the world skidding sideways in spumes of dust."

An occasional pun adds variety: "we loved the room, Christine and I, and we loved in it and loved it all the more, the room I mean."

Suraiya banteringly suggests that "When in doubt alliterate and let the lulling link of language preserve you from atrocious action." Suraiya's images compel attention: "her past, Christmas tree hung with the bright shapes of remembered events," "Anil's

room was a pampered cavity in the derelict booth of an ancient building.”

All these effects are not mere icing; they are very much the cake itself. For, in the final instance he reads well, particularly aloud. We may take this passage as an example: “I knew I loved her in September. Oh yes, I did love her. There is little doubt about that. The sun through the open curtains and the slats of the shutters laid warm bands on her. Cool, pale and glowing gold, cutaneous keys on which my fingers traced a September symphony. I took her out. Into a September of parties, restaurants and pictures. To parks of muted rain in the evenings. She clung to my arm and said, I love you.”

With Suraiya a sentence, as this passage shows, does not remain an isolated unit, complete in sense and sound. In both it is a part of the pattern of the paragraph.

There are times of course when this fine balance tilts, an image becomes long drawn out, the writing affected and the meaning clouded in a haze of words. This failing is particularly noticeable in the second half of “Independence Day.”

This skill in language is matched by skill in technique. Jug Suraiya employs the technique of the cinema, focusing attention on an isolated movement, or a part of a gesture. There is swift transition from image to image, and the whole action unfurls as on the screen. “Her slow body lurched and when she could look back Harry was a lonely figure, etched almost luminous in the water clear air against the black road and the dark mass of clouds overhead.”

Character drawing is not limited to one method. The method varies with the character. Sometimes the focus rests on a man’s prominent feature or features. Or, a character may be suggested by his manner: “My name is Anwar Imam’. His introduction had the same easy punctiliousness as his changing of the gears of his car.” A man’s routine may suggest his nature. The clerk in “The Office” is described almost as though he were an automation. “From the corner to the office was 176 paces,

counted one preoccupied morning and the resultant figure forgetfully stored away with all the other facts and figures which composed the data of his life.” Sometimes the drawing of character may extend over a number of pages, because only one aspect is revealed at a time. Juliette is drawn stroke by casual stroke, by her lively laughter and her attitude to sin. In stories written in the first person, the narrator’s character is suggested by his view of men and places and by his comments.

Apart from his human characters, the city is a tangible presence in each of the stories, conditioning the responses of the characters. At one end is the clerk who is unhappy in it, rootless and without moorings. In between are Peter Pan, who remembers with nostalgias his school days in a hill station, and the youthful interviewee, who observes with detachment the slightly different personality of a new city, who is aware that the show and the glitter is the mere facade of a rootless existence, and who speaks about the “larger topic of the city.” At the other end is the teenager born after Independence who knows no other home than the city and is hardly conscious of it. The presence of the city in the stories increases in direct proportion to the character’s dislike of it. Thus, the clerk, “felt a near desperate impatience to get back home, the familiar room with the evening balcony from where he watched the city ebb towards its ending of days and seasons.”

Suraiya presents his personalities, human and non-human, with economy, and the features of these personalities have a significant bearing on the story.

The conception and working out of each Suraiya story are almost the same. A character responding to the colour, tumult and events around him. These are recorded very much as they would be by a technicolour camera. “Days that swung from late summer to wet winter with a caprice of monsoon clouds. Blues and greys and the grass a drowning green where we sat on damp, warm benches in sodden and sunny parks. Or walked on the paved perimeter of the enormity of the Maidan with Christine

cooing over all the babies that stony-faced ayahs wheeled in evening perambulation beside rattling tram cars.”

This atmosphere, which is always sharply evoked, forms the background against which the character recalls events from the past. Reminiscence and reality are thrown together, not in chronological order, but in seemingly haphazard sequence. Character and atmosphere combine to give a story its pattern, however crazy. The story does not move in a straight line from exposition to end; it loops round events to weave a multifestooned braid. The final impression is one of a comprehensive experience.

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On the surface, “A Chap Called Peter Pan” describes one night in the life of a night club singer. The noise, bustle and atmosphere in the restaurant, suggestions of professional jealousy among the members of the band, the female singer’s attraction to Peter – these form the background to Peter Pan’s memories of his sister Juliette who left her parents to become the mistress of a rich, married hill man. They also form the background to nostalgia for his school days in Darjeeling, to recollections of home, and of his mother and father. Peter cannot get over the shock of Juliette’s action. Through this tangle of memories emerges a picture of the way of life, and outlook, of a middle class Anglo-Indian family; the cross relationship of the members; and the personality of each of them. The reader also understands the tragedy of Peter Pan, which Peter himself does not: for all his down-to-earthness, Peter romanticizes his sister and in his attachment attributes qualities to her which she does not possess. The author draws for the reader’s benefit Juliette’s lively nature, (bordering on the frivolous) in between Peter Pan’s reveries by means of cameos from her life. Had Peter been aware of this aspect of his sister’s nature, he would not have received the shock he did.

This particular story is written in Anglo-Indian English, and the passages which

purport to be a transcription of Peter Pan's thoughts strongly suggest the spoken voice. An occasional vulgarism – innocuous enough to be a mere expletive – heightens the colloquial effect: "Catch me calling her all that shit."

"The Interview" reveals the mind of a city-bred anglicized young man – mature for its years, banteringly cynical, tender, mock-serious and, most important, ambivalent, not necessarily by turns, responding with fresh feeling and quick insight to its environment. The interview becomes a turning point in this youth's life. It marks the end of his affair with an Anglo-Indian girl, an "end, firmly posited, was always there before the beginning." This remark reveals the man's ironical turn of mind as well as his clear-sightedness. The interview also heralds his entry into "the commercial cabal of this country, open to the select elect who get who get four figure salaries and over." He scoffs at the codes of the managerial class and yet is ready to join it.

The quality of this mind gives Suraiya ample scope to indulge his skills of irony and language. To take one not necessarily representative example: "Anita was an independent-minded' girl and had seen a fairish bit of the globe, but this was, after all, still very much a man's world and in the final, matrimonial analysis her father would do the calculated eenie-meenine-minie-mo-ing for her. And this nigger, the way I figured it, was caught squarely by his toe, and not very likely to start screaming either. Mo is me, I said to myself, feeling that last course of realization settle slowly in my stomach."

In "The Office" Suraiya draws the portrait of an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering being. The description from Eliot, though not used in the story, is apt. The clerk (his exact designation is nowhere mentioned; nor does it matter) is not happy in the city and his mind keeps going back to his days in the village. "For sometime now his thoughts, like water running downhill, terminated in still, deep pools in which the

early days of his childhood were mirrored.” (the fusing of meaning and image is skilful). Work in the department suffers. Matters come to a head when two American tourists apply for an extension of their stay – the incident which triggers off the story – and the clerk recommends it without proper scrutiny of their papers. A subordinate, eager for promotion, reports against him. When told about it, the clerk, instead of being anxious, floats off on a reverie of childhood – a psychological release. And the story ends with the scene it opened with, a squall of pigeons bursting over the street corner, but with this difference that the man is in a different frame of mind, no longer harried, no longer tense, in fact looking forward to his impending dismissal.

This story lends itself to symbolical interpretation. The theme of the story – all that is good and creative in city-bred man is not dead- is symbolized by the rejection of the city by the clerk. This interpretation is strengthened by the clerk’s references to Kafka and symbolism. He even makes a notation which goes: “The paradoxical tragedy of Kafka was that while trying to reinstate the individual he made a symbol of him.” The clerk harks back to his past; he never thinks about the future. Has man no future? The common opening and ending are significant. They seem to mark the limits of the city dweller’s cribb’d cabin’s confin’d existence.

Suraiya’s short stories invite comparison with those of Bunny Reuben. The writing of both shows the influence of the cinema. Both use language with a degree of mastery. Suraiya matches Reuben in his confident handling of technique. Suraiya does not depend, like Reuben, on coinages and hyphenated words for his effects. The colourful, forceful verbs he chooses serve his purpose.

Though Suraiya matches Reuben in technique and language, he falls short in respect of vision. Suraiya knows intimately the young mind and its romantic view of the world. Reuben brings to bear on his subject a more mature outlook, a greater understanding of reality and of human suffering and aspiration. Nevertheless, Jug

Suraiya's achievement and promise augur well for the Indian short story in English.

(b) Vivek Adarkar.

Vivek Adarkar writes about much younger people than does Jug Suraiya. Three of the seven stories in his first collection, *We Could Be Happy Together*, deal with school boys and girls, and the other four draw a convincing picture of under-graduate life. His characters come from upper middle class or rich homes; they attend English medium schools and colleges; they think and speak in English. They move in "a world of smartly starched white uniforms with green striped school ties and monthly school socials where dancing was allowed. " The undergraduates are more emancipated. The boys and girls date each other, go steady, and see movies together."

In fact, the larger traditional world, in which such relationships are frowned upon, serves as the backdrop for the cheerful world of the young. Thus, in "The Squealer", Asha and the narrator return from the theatre through back alleys lest "a friend of the family saw her walking around with me like this." Renu in "Pretty as the Taj" presents her boyfriend to her parents not as her friend but as her brother's friend (with the brother's consent of course).

When the fear of the traditional world is absent, the doings of the young are marked by high spirits. A bright young thing may, as in "Monica And The Flag Swipers", apportion her attentions according to the number of sign boards and flags her friends can steal for her. Another may try to liven up a city after dark, by driving recklessly through the streets on a "borrowed scooter" as in "Pretty as the Taj, "and end up against a tree, the scooter damaged and her companion in trouble with his friends. It does not infrequently happen that their companions incur the displeasure of their parents and the college authorities also.

Despite their boisterousness, the young men and women, especially the former,

are highly principled. Respect, particularly self-respect, is important to them. Cowardice is a failing, and they will do anything to redeem themselves even for a momentary lapse. The narrator in “The Squealer” acts when he understands the significance of the word courage.

“The Squealer” exposes the senseless brutality that lies behind “ragging”, the practice of seniors humiliating freshers. If the fresher takes it like a man, he is accepted. If he reports to the authorities, he is ostracized throughout his stay in college.

The narrator in “The Squealer” is made to balance on the footboard of the crowded University bus and repeatedly hit by a loutish senior called Sonny. He breaks into tears when he is made to wear lipstick. Asha, a girl he had known in school, who is a witness to the incident, sends in a report to his college authorities. The narrator is questioned on its authenticity and given twenty four hours to confirm it in writing. His first reaction is to deny it, because, for one thing, Sonny threatens dire consequences.

The next morning as the narrator is waiting outside the college office to submit his report, he sees a boy who was crippled in a fall when he was made to walk the ledge of a high verandah. The narrator realizes that courage is a highly subjective quality. He changes his mind about Asha’s report and confirms it. Sonny is suspended for a year. Sonny and his gang later attack the narrator. The presence of Asha gives the fresher courage to hit back. He wins Asha’s respect and regains his self-respect.

Talking about romanticism, the narrator in “We Could Be Happy Together,” is happy to discover a girl in the same congested, near-slum area who is like him. “Hating our environment and, at the same time, stretching out with the tentacles of our talent for an ideal that perhaps existed only in our minds.” He learns of her existence through her answers to a questionnaire in a magazine borrowed from a second hand book stall.

The narrator begins to build a dream world with Kamala at its centre. When they meet, everything crumbles. She consoles him with the thought that “questionnaires were not meant for Indian girls but for girls who came from a completely different society.”

Self-respect is not the only quality that links the characters in the stories. There is a similarity between all the young men. They are shy, often tongue-tied, idealistic and dreamy. Adarkar's girls, on the other hand, are more down-to-earth, serious, and maturer than their boyfriends. Thus, it is Renu who bails her friend out of trouble after the scooter accident; Kamala can distinguish between dream-worlds and reality. Both Renu and Kamala are almost patronizing in their sympathy for their lost young men. This limited view of character is further narrowed down by the fact that most of the stories are told in the first person. The narrator in one story is only slightly different from the narrator in another. In no story are we given an idea of the physical and other characteristics of the narrator. He is faceless, and he remains nameless throughout.

And he speaks in almost the same tone throughout. This tone, like the attitude of the young, is frank, direct and simple. The rhythms of Adarkar's writing are conversational, very often colloquial. Unlike Jug Suraiya, Adarkar has no time or inclination for word-play or for frills. His language goes to the other extreme; it is stark and pared. Where writing is an art with Suraiya, it is a craft with Adarkar. Language is a mere tool; let us use it as such, appears to be his attitude.

Adarkar uses metaphors sparingly, and for this reason they stand out in the midst of his spare prose.

“..we could see the town sprinkled over the valley like grated nuts on a cake.”

“Letty would open her purse and distribute coins to the beggars who clustered round her like pigeons.”

Nowhere in his writing does Adarkar try to influence the reader's response. The

reader is left to draw his own conclusions. For this reason a reader may detect ironic or humorous undertones in a number of incidents. One such situation occurs in “We Could be Happy Together,” when, after the narrator has mustered up enough courage to speak to Kamala, his not-so-friendly neighbours start shouting.

“ ‘Police! Police!’ Sunil shouted pointing at me. ‘This boy here is pestering girls. Arrest him for flirting! Police! Police!’ ”

The stories reveal good craftsmanship. The endings however are unconvincing. The denouements, the “insights” his characters achieve, the change of heart or attitude, are all easy and too sudden.

Finally, Adarkar has a knack for choosing striking titles: “The Squealer,” “The Man in the Whisky Ads,” “Girl as pretty as the Taj,” “Monica and the Flag Swipers”, “We could be Happy Together.”

Vivek Adarkar admits us into a bright, carefree world marked by idealism and high spirits, hope and self-respect, a world in which there is irony but no satire, disappointment but no disillusionment. Because Adarkar’s writing is objective, the young can recall it with nostalgia, and the young at heart surrender themselves to its romanticism.

Section V

CHAPTER 6

SHASHI DESHPANDE

The fable of the seven blind men who went to see an elephant is an apt metaphor for Shashi Deshpande's short stories. The blind men represent the environment – which includes tradition, male attitudes, circumstances, religion, folklore, movies, and myth – in which Deshpande's women characters live. The elephant stands for Shashi Deshpande's women characters.

The fable does not tell us what the elephant feels or thinks about the opinions of the blind men. Shashi Deshpande takes the reader inside the heart and mind of her elephant. It would be not be stretching the argument too far to call the elephant Every Woman, especially since SD makes her intention clear by not giving names to many of her female characters.

The woman's role in Indian society has been chalked out for her. How she is expected to behave as a daughter, wife, mother, widow and even as a woman is clearly defined.

Shashi Deshpande writes about the contradictions of and in a woman's life. The contradictions and the tensions arise because the modern Indian woman feels the need to assert her individuality even as she accepts the traditional roles that are thrust upon her. Shashi Deshpande deals with the contemporary situation in the light of changing traditional mores.

Shashi Deshpande's characters accept classification at one level. They conform outwardly. They are actors consciously playing stereotyped roles. The real drama is concealed within. A good illustration of this contradiction is the narrator in "An Antidote to Boredom"

"Do you want more sugar in your coffee?"

'Sugar? No...no. Maybe a little bit.'

'Half a spoon?'

I got the sugar, stirred the coffee. And suddenly, standing there, my sari tucked in at my waist, the picture of a solicitous wife serving her husband, I retreated into a wild flight of fancy. What if I came up to the table, I asked him silently, walking on my hands, your coffee balanced on my feet? I concealed a small smile at the vision I had conjured up, knowing fully well that he would do nothing, because he would notice nothing but that he had been served his coffee. No need to conceal my smile, either. For that again was something he would not notice."

Or, as another of her characters, in "Why a Robin," poignantly says, "It is as if I am, in my own house, confronted with two closed rooms. I am condemned to sit outside and gaze helplessly at the closed doors."

In fact if one were to look for a theme, stated or implied, in her stories, it could be summed up by the word, Aloneness. There are many aspects to Aloneness. Being in the world and not of it, learning to cope without any support, wearing a mask for the benefit of others, assuming a persona at variance with individual personality, individuality parading as stereotype, and plain loneliness are some of these aspects. Shashi Deshpande shines a light on many of them. She does this by focusing on the circumstances of each of her woman characters. Because the circumstances of each character are different, an individual facet lights up. With the different facets opening up, it is as if the seven blind men have become seventy.

Shashi Deshpande does not confine her writing to women of a certain class. She draws her characters from all strata of society and her women cut across all ages. In addition, her characters occupy various positions on the domestic and social scale, ranging from total servility to complete liberation. There is, on the one hand, the mistress of an aristocratic household who acquiesces in her husband's desire to get

herself impregnated by a young doctor so that the family name may continue. The lot of another woman is only slightly better; the narrator in “Why a Robin” is a lonely housewife who suffers from feelings of inferiority in her relations to her husband, her in-laws and even her daughter.

Some even try to assert their strength, like the narrator in “Death of a Child”, who, against the wishes of her husband goes in for an abortion because “marriage, childbirth, destroy something in a woman. A reserve. A secretiveness. An innocence”.

A kindred independent soul is the protagonist in the “A Liberated Woman.” There is irony in the title. An intelligent and hard working woman falls in love with a man of a different caste. Her parents oppose the match. She goes ahead and marries him. Success in her profession – she is a doctor – becomes the cause of the break up of the marriage.

Similar in temperament is the newly wed victim of an arranged marriage in “Intrusion” who would like to know her husband as a human being and as friend before she “opens the mysteries of her body to him”, and who resents it when she is forced to.

Some of the characters try to escape their environment, but they find that the chains that bind them are too strong. The narrator in “An Antidote to Boredom” meets a young widower at her son’s school. The widower understands and cares for her. For the first time she discovers the dignity of being wanted. But she hesitates to take that all important step. Her prison will not let her go. She is the one who has to let go.

"I let go of the mirage I had tried to grasp so long, and now I realized, when it was too late, the most piercing thought of all - that it had been no mere antidote to boredom, but the best part of my life. And I let it go."

Is her husband even aware of her inner life? He continues to treat her as part of

the furniture. This husband, with slight permutations becomes the prototype of the male in the other stories. The male cannot, to use an American idiom, “see the elephant in the room”.

The insensitivity of the male is like the blindness of the seven elephant seekers: they cannot read the silences of their women.

The way the author presents her female characters makes a mockery of the term, “the weaker sex”. It is their inherent strength which allows them to carry on and hold the family together in the face of disillusionment, even when life has gone sour.

Some critics see these aborted acts of defiance as feminism. It is true that Shashi Deshpande’s first collection of stories appeared in the late seventies. Feminism was all the rage then. But this term cannot be applied to any of Shashi Deshpande’s characters because they are first and foremost women, characters who come alive as individuals. They are not symbols or puppets, or activists who wear their feminism on the sleeve.

How is all this angst conveyed? Not through tone. The tone is not angry. Not through linguistic gymnastics, which became a sort of literary fad during the seventies and eighties. It is conveyed through cool measured prose. The words are precisely chosen. The language is matched to the level of sensitivity of a character. The character portrays her situation as though she were speaking to a friend. This informal tone evokes empathy in the reader. Great attention is paid to detail. Depth is achieved by showing nuances. The events go back and forth in time; this helps to build emotional intensity. Like Katherine Mansfield, Shashi Deshpande employs the stream-of-consciousness narration to go into the hearts and minds of her women.

The sparing but meaningful use of imagery helps Shashi Deshpande to suggest nuance and add depth to her narration. In the story, “Why a Robin,” the bird is not only the mundane issue which sets off the events of the evening but also the symbol

of the relationship between the daughter and the mother. The daughter comes home and asks her mother to give her ideas for her assignment of an essay on the robin. The mother says,

“I know nothing about it. Except that it's a pretty bird. With a red breast...? And it comes in winter ...?”

The image of the robin and the daughter merge: the mother knows as much about her daughter as she does of the exotic bird. Hurt by the daughter's reaction – stamping out of the room, a gesture emphasizing the mother's failure – she finds solace in a memory of childhood when she used to watch the peacocks dance outside the temple. Later that night as the mother gathers courage to comfort her distraught and lonely daughter, her childhood fascination with peacocks becomes the instrument of reconciliation and understanding. It is as if the mother and daughter have become two beautiful birds when understanding takes wing.

If one were to choose a story which brings together all the qualities of Shashi Deshpande as a writer, a story which seamlessly blends, imagery, narration, myth, and theme, it would be “Hear me Sanjaya.”

In order to understand the Kunti that Shashi Deshpande has fleshed out from the figure in the Mahabharata, a few facts from the epic need to be recalled. Kunti as a child was given in adoption by her father to the childless king, Kuntibhoja. Her name was changed from Pritha to Kunti at the time of the adoption. The rishi Durvasa gave Kunti a boon in the form of a mantra by which she could summon any deva and have a child by him. Kunti, skeptical about the mantra, tried it, and conceived the child of the god Surya. In order not to shame her clan, Kunti abandoned the child in a basket in a river. The child is found by a charioteer and raised as Karna. Years later Kunti meets Karna, ironically, on the banks of a river

Kunti married King Pandu. Shortly afterwards King Pandu took a second wife

Madri. Since King Pandu was barren, Kunti used her mantra three times to beget three Pandava princes. Kunti revealed the mantra to Madri who begot 2 more Pandavas

In the story “Hear me Sanjaya” the Mahabharata war is over. Kunti, having endured a lifetime of suffering, joins Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, the parents of the dead hundred Kuravas, to seek peace in the forest. Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra’s charioteer, accompanies them. As Kunti and Sanjaya walk, Kunti related her story to him.

"My father gave me away - how easily he gave me away. As if I was a bit of property... I can't even remember if it made me angry. But I remember I was frightened. I thought my father gave me away to his friends because he was displeased with me. And I thought - what if I displease this man too? Will he give me away to someone else? And so I did everything I could to please him, I tried so hard never to displease him."

We learn about the reason she decided to make Draupadi the common wife of the five Pandava brothers. We become privy to the foresight which led her to advise the Pandavas how and when to make alliances in order to garner support. She also explains the rationale behind the decisions she took. Event after event in Kunti’s life comes up in her conversation, complete with how she felt and thought at that time.

The Kunti that is revealed to Sanjaya could be any one of Shashi Deshpande’s characters in 20th century India. The concerns, the suffering, the silence, the neglect are the same, as are the hidden reserves of strength, the wisdom to hold the family together and guide men folk to a better life. By retelling a mythical story Shashi Deshpande has made some important but unstated points about the lot of women over the centuries.

Shashi Deshpande output has been steady. She has brought out six collections of short stories, eight novels, and four books for children. Her short stories have been wide anthologized. Her novels have been translated into a number of Indian and

European languages. A novel has been made into a movie. Her writing is the subject of a number of scholarly dissertations, She has won a number of awards including the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. Starting from relative obscurity she has attained celebrity status. That is because she has written about situations and characters that strike a chord in all women, and in most men, and come through as the stories of Every Woman.

Section V

CHAPTER 7

ARUN JOSHI

Arun Joshi the short story writer sees himself as the literary descendant of the anonymous authors of the Panchatantra and Jataka tales for whom story-telling had to have a purpose. Joshi's stories are parables of modern Indian life, Seven of the ten stories in the only collection he has published to far, *The Survivor*, fit this description. The man behind them is the same serious-minded person who, as in the novel *The Apprentice*, reflects sadly on the state of things in India. The other three stories are in line with his earlier novels, *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, in which the problems of the individual, particularly adjustment, form the central motif.

Joshi reveals his purposes with suggestive phrases such as "a tale of modern India," "wistfulness... that is so much like starlight but turns sour in an age such as ours," "a hot wind blowing in from the river carrying with it the dust of our civilization." In "The Eve-Teasers," Joshi describes the typical activity of two teenagers in a story that is almost a homily. The protagonist of the title story is "happy to say, gentlemen, that inspite of heavy odds I have survived this deluge of progress." The behaviour of Kewal Kapoor, a PRO in a pharmaceutical firm, is, in its inanity, a protest against materialism and conformism, particularly of the boxwallah creed. The old man in "Intruder in the Discotheque" approaches Mr. Gomes, 'Seller of Dreams' because he wishes to appear young so that he can win the love of a girl. The fate he meets, apart from the ridicule, is the fate of all those who wear borrowed feathers or ape what they can never inherit. "Harmik" tells the story of a young Indian who lured by the wealthy West drifts from one degrading job to another till he is discovered as a performing gigolo in a live show. "The siren song cannot end; more will be smuggled across; because the Harmiks will send home flattering accounts and cannot return out

of shame.”

Arun Joshi is a deft writer, so that, on the whole, he succeeds in concealing his didactic purpose. But there are times when his anger gets the better of him, as in “The Eve Teasers”. When the girl Ram teases turns out to be his best friend, Shyam’s sister, the author takes the opportunity to moralize. “Where was Lakshman who knew only Sita’s feet? And presently his shame turned into a primordial terror, a terror that chokes all those who have sisters, wives or daughters.”

“The Boy with the Flute” rather naively illustrates the power of prayer. Mr. Sethi, a wealthy businessman, is robbed and gagged as he is returning from a visit to his mistress. In his misery he says a prayer he had not uttered for the last thirty years. A boy, claiming to be a labourer in a nearby factory, materializes and sets him free. After that the boy just cannot be traced.

In all forms of allegorical story telling, the characters tend to be types. This is so with Arun Joshi’s characters. Ram and Shyam are meant to represent the youth of today, the purveyors of the “passing pressures of female flesh.” Harmik represents those Indians who forsake these shores to try their fortune abroad. The intruder plays his puppet’s role against the “elfin splendour” and iridescence of the discotheque and is as out of place in it as the discotheque is in an Indian village. Mr. Sethi displays the desires and fears expected of a man in his position.

“The Frontier Mail is Gone” combines the features of the two types of stories Arun Joshi writes, parables which feature types, and stories about individuals at odds with their surroundings. Leela is alive in more senses than one. Not only is she an irrepressible and mischievous young widow forever teasing her young brother and trying her father’s patience but her zest for life – “ I wanted to meet men” –which takes her to a brothel in Bombay, makes the narrator realize that passion can be beautiful. “And so we wait before closed gates while life hurtles by, screaming to be

taken.”

This story is a good example of Joshi’s technical mastery. The narrator comes to know Leela and her brother, and begins to take an observer’s interest in the life of the signalman and his family, because he “was deadlocked with the Frontier Mail nearly every morning and had to wait at the level crossing. We notice how the situation provides Joshi with a striking metaphor – the level crossing – which in turn invests the story, given a slight shift in meaning, with symbolism (closed gates).

This is the sort of skill we encounter frequently in Joshi’s stories. To give on e more example, what arrears a comical mannerism in the Principal in “The Gherao “– rubbing the chest during moments of stress – takes on tragic overtones when the Principal recalls that out of six months in the year he suffers from asthma. When his wife was alive “she rubbed my chest at night with warm oil so that I could breathe.”

Joshi displays assurance not only in the working out of details but also in ordering the overall pattern of a short story. “The Servant,” for instance, takes the form of a crime reporter’s presentation of facts. It begins, “What the servant had to say was this,” and goes on to give background details about his family, his habits, places of employment before he worked for the Khannas, We are brought back to the present with the words, “At this point the servant started to weep. It seemed like hysteria.” The reportage continues to describe his stay with the Khannas and the changes which came over him in the course of time. The illusion of an interrogation is kept up when, just before the narration of the incident which led to Mrs Khanna’s death, it is stated that “At this point he turned hysterical once again.” The story ends at the point it would have begun in real life: “That was where the police found him.”

This quiet confidence extends to language also. “The Servant” has an apparent flatness of tone in keeping with the subject. “The Survivor” is told in fast-moving American idiom, reflecting the thinking of our city-bred executives: “He had this

buddy called Buntty heading a drugs company who got me fixed up in their public relations.” In “The Gherao”, the narrator’s tone is that of a facetious young man relating a series of interesting incidents. “Let me tell you about this gherao that happened at our college.” The accents are more long-draw out and the tone more leisurely in a story like “The Boy With a Flute.” “At the time of which we are speaking, Mr. Sethi had not uttered a prayer for thirty years,” “The boy, when I last heard, was still to be found.” The language acquires a mocking undertone in “A Trip”. The movement of the sentences in “The Home Coming” is sombre, reflecting the confusion in the officer’s mind.

Arun Joshi is a serious writer who does not weigh down his stories with seriousness. His short stories are as superbly crafted as his novels. He makes his points briefly, efficiently, effectively.

Section V

CHAPTER 8

KAMALA DAS

The stories in *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* have one theme really, a study of man-woman relationships. The stories deal not merely with aspects of this relationship but with various facets of these aspects: among others, fulfillment in love is short-lived; what each individual has to reconcile himself to is the most isolating of loneliness; one can never fathom the turn human affection will take.

The last is the point of “The Young Man with the pitted Face”. The month-old relationship between the dying woman and “the beautiful young man” ends ironically; the woman recovers unexpectedly, is brought home and is baffled as to why he will never visit her. “In December” the woman experiences the creeping sense of unfulfillment even in the midst of happiness with her lover. “A Little Kitten” is about marital infidelity; contentment for both husband and wife can, strangely, bloom only in its lush soil. “Santan Choudhuri’s Wife” presents the obverse of this situation. Even after the husband has had proof of the wife’s infidelity – a middle class woman spending the day as a rich man’s mistress – he refuses to believe it, and the story ends with the husband thinking, ‘Suspicion is a kind of poison weed.’ to whose addiction he must succumb. The wife in “Iqbal” asserts her superiority over her husband’s homosexual friend because she has the capacity to bear children for him which the other lacks.

In working out these situations, Kamala Das is very much the poet. Sensitivity, the carefully selected detail, delicacy of touch, the use of imagery – these are some of the elements which distinguish her treatment of her subject. The narration is studiously casual as it captures the evanescent nuance of the fleeting moment or the passing emotion or some characteristic quality in the surroundings. Indeed, her stories

succeed – they are touching, or witty, or naughty – according to their degree of suggestiveness.

Kamala Das never states. Under-statement is also rare. The context, built up with quick, casual strokes, tells all. The core does not have to be revealed. Even character is suggested by a single detail. “The canine tooth that protruded a little made her mouth prettier”. So is atmosphere. “If she survived she would return to the narrow confines of her brown body and the little flat with the blue brocade curtains and her favourite bronzes.”

Kamala Das’s subdued humour which occasionally flashes like the passing glint of light on water and which contributes to the individuality of the stories, is created by the same suggestive means. The humour is never extraneous; it is always a part of the situation.

Whenever Kamala Das exaggerates we have the impression that it must have embarrassed her to do so. “Her voice was so melodious and sad that the cat stirred and opened its eyes.” “Santan Chaudhuri’s Wife” is typical of her rich but quiet humour. In “The Coroner” Sylvester Louis Gomes’s tale of the loss of his son so moves the listener that she begins to weep, and Gomes has to console her. The betrayed on the defensive, the bereaved as the consoler, it is from the topsy turvy, the reversal of the expected (a mistress during the day) that Kamala Das draws her humour.

It is a measure of her sophistication as an artist that Kamala Das can compress so much in such little space, for the stories are very short, hardly a thousand words on an average.

The disadvantage of so much compression is that it limits her power of portraying character. Except possibly for three, all her characters have a certain sameness. The exceptions are Gomes in “The Coroner”, Gopi, the ungrateful son, in “The Tattered Blanket”, and the mother in “Leukaemia” who sends away her only daughter to a

boarding school so that she can learn discipline and relents too late, when her daughter does not have long to live.

Most of the stories are presented from the woman's point of view; it could almost be one woman, somewhat highly-charged, and quite irrational in betraying her husband or clinging to the men who betray her.

Imagery stands out prominently in the spare surroundings of the stories. Often, however, it appears to be an ornamental addition to, rather than, a natural extension of a thought or a feeling. "Her womb that had lain fallow had grown fibroids just as a desert may grow cacti and carnivorous plants."

These brilliant cameos and vignettes, impressed with the strong personality of the author, catching the passing moment with such sensitivity and intensity, rightly earn for the writer the distinction of being the only gentle voice of the seventies.

Section V
CHAPTER 9
MANOHAR MALGONKAR

Manohar Malgonkar the short story writer is a distinct personality just as Manohar Malgonkar the novelist stands apart from the other Indian novelists writing in English. As a novelist, Malgonkar's accent is on the carefully plotted story abounding in incident and accident, rich in romanticism perhaps also in history, which sets out to provide honest-to-goodness entertainment. As a short story writer, Malgonkar is not concerned with poverty, suffering, degradation, slice-of-life cameos, photographic accounts of everyday experience, or moral and political dilemmas. His focus is on the sunnier side of life. His aim is to entertain.

Paradoxically, Malgonkar appears to be apologetic about publishing his short stories in book form. In the preface to *A Toast in Warm Wine* he suggests that it was brought out to please Dr C S Amur, the critic. The publication of the second collection, *Bombay Beware*, is attributed to friends who frequently wrote to him after Andrew Graham had included a story of his in an anthology, *Best Army Stories*, to publish his army stories in one volume. Either Malgonkar does not think highly of his short stories or he is being excessively modest. Whatever the case, he should rest assured, poorer collections have seen the light of day.

Manohar Malgonkar's short stories draw their variety from the same background that enriches his novels: his experience as an army officer, a shikari, a tea planter, and a manganese miner among other professions. All the sixteen stories in *Bombay Beware* concern army men, retired or in service. The stories in *A Toast in Warm Wine* deal with civilian life. The stories in *Rumble Tumble* (the army cook's term for scrambled eggs) draw on both backgrounds, besides introducing two new topics, the growing cult of the swami (described as big business) and the tinsel glitter of the film world.

The source of amusement in most of the stories is a common one: an embarrassing situation which leads to the discomfiture of one or more people. In “A Little Sugar. A Little Tea” it happens that just as the Commanding Officer goes for mahseer fishing his adjutant has to prepare the company for sudden inspection by an officer who knows where the unfit men and mules have been hidden.

The dash with which these situations are created are meant to occasion humour. Indeed, Malgonkar’s army officers give the impression of being overgrown schoolboys out on a romp. In “Pack Drill” Brig Collins, “the most cursed at officer in the whole Indian army”, hides two full-sized bricks in the packs of the officers he sends out on patrol drill.

Malgonkar’s civilian characters are only slightly less inhibited.

To create or wriggle out of an embarrassing situation calls for ingenuity and Malgonkar reserves his admiration for the resourceful person. In a sense the author deals only with this type, with slight variations of course, a type straight out of the Panchatantra. In “Pull Push” he takes the form of a chaprassi, immune to scoldings, who gets a troublesome officer transferred with the help of a trade union leader. In “Temple Mouse” the chela of a publicity hungry America-bound swami matches wits with the chamcha of a film star anxious to act in a foreign film.

Malgonkar is so preoccupied with presenting permutations of the resourceful type that we cannot think of one memorable character in the three collections. There are of course a few who impress as individuals. One is Kistu the poacher who, caught by an enthusiastic Forest Range officer, is made to lead an honest life imitating tiger roars in a circus. Another is Seetharam the bearer who takes an almost wifely interest in the life of his master and disapproves of his fiancé and later of his marriage. A third is Hazy Sahib of “Top Cat” who leads a happy bachelor’s existence with his dog, Busty, till he marries, after which he has to put up with his wife and her five cats.

It is obvious that these stories are the sort swapped in the Mess or in the Club. What turns the anecdotes into stories is Malgonkar's immaculate craftsmanship. He has a strong sense of form. He chooses details carefully and the trappings are interestingly arranged. He never relaxes the tension in a story.

Atmosphere is the strong point of almost every Malgonkar story. It is most marked in the shikar stories, particularly in "To Hold a Tiger", in which admiration for a handsome tiger makes a crack American hunter drive it away, thus winning the respect of his Indian guide. The mood is lighter in "Bear On a Plate", which shows how a tiger shoot is "managed," with old and mangy animals from the circus. "Shikar De Luxe" tells how such a show is mismanaged.

Malgonkar's crafting skill is evident in the various methods he adopts to narrate his story. "Shikar De Luxe" is carried forward in a series of letters and telegrams between His Highness's secretary and the Range Officer. In "Hush" the dealings, cross dealings and double dealings between the smugglers and Customs officials are conducted in six short scenes. In "Tourist Distraction" the girl who aids in the fleecing of an American by carpet seller describes the episode to her friend over the telephone.

The narrative in this story has the crispness of the spoken tongue: "Oh, Jeanie, I could've laughed if I hadn't been so livid, the way Asafali was trying to charm the Yankee Dollar. It was all gestures, of course, because as you know, Asafali doesn't speak a word of English.

Malgonkar matches language to subject in other stories also. The first person Army stories have the typical clipped accents of the armyman. The Hindusthani words are not thrown in merely for colour; they are necessary to give the right feel. "(he) opened the degchis in the cookhouse and sampled the food;" "wonderful chappaties and sag-gost ". Metaphors are used in the same no-nonsense, unself-conscious manner. "Goa had curled back to its siesta." The language yields easily to

satire;" a twisted theatrical smile as though he had been practicing before a mirror." It is accommodating to farcical effects also; "Sukhpal was the most-transferred chaprassi in the secretariat, a slumberer-in –corridors, a dawdler-between-errands, a misplacer-of files, incurable hummer and user of scented hair oil."

Unfortunately, this appropriateness does not extend to dialogue. It is convincing only in the army stories. But when the same clipped accents are used in the other stories we have the impression that all Malgonkar's characters must have, at one time or another, served in the army.

All said and done, Malgonkar, by drawing on a different background, and dealing with subjects not handled by other writers, has added to the variety of the Indian short story in English.

Section V

CHAPTER 10

A.D.GORWALA

A.D.Gorwala's *The Queen of Beauty and Other Tales* marks a new, even if a small, departure in the Indian short story in English. Gorwala's short fiction combines features of the short story and the tale in an individual manner. Gorwala has describes his short fiction as tales and not short stories, but it is a mixed genre difficult to define or label.

A tale, unlike a short story, can be related. Events follow one another in quick succession and provide the chief interest. Atmosphere and characterization take second place. All these characteristics are to be found in Gorwala's tales.

But we also find in them elements not usually associated with tales. Sophistication, elaborate construction and a cultivated mannered style are features connected with the consciously fashioned short story.

The blend of features of the short story and the tale gives Gorwala's short fiction its individual flavour. It is a flavour we take time to get used to, like that of non-fragrant but strong Assam tea, but once the taste is acquired we enjoy both the manner and the matter of the tales.

The collection consists of five fables, five tales, and one story which combines the features of both the fables and the tales. The author himself does not make any distinction, but their diverse nature becomes apparent on even a casual reading. The *Queen of Beauty and Other Tales* presents basic moral issues in the form of fables and deals with the author's personal and administrative experiences in a thinly fictionalized garb.

The tales centre round the activity of an Assistant Collector who is not referred to by name. His individual features and characteristics are not described. Attention is

focused solely on his life as an administrator. As such, he is courageous, wise, powerful. He is known far and wide for his sense of justice. He acts without fear or favour and commends his actions to God. In word and deed he acknowledges one master only, his conscience. Yet he is not without tact. In his personal life, we get the impression that he is a cultured gentleman, who knows Persian and is interested in poetry and music.

The focus on one aspect of his life makes him a two-dimensional character, and, in the process a symbol. He stands for what an ideal administrator should be.

The subordinates who serve him are referred to by name, Dhanji, his butler, Mohammad Khan his Naik, and Pribhdas, his shristedar. But they, too, are presented as two dimensional characters. They are symbolic of the devotion and respect an administrator of the old school commanded.

The tales illustrate one or a few of the Assistant Collector's qualities. The title story reveals his courage and fearless use of discretionary power. An eloping couple, fleeing from the wrath of their parents and of the man the woman called Queen of Beauty was betrothed to, seek the protection of the Assistant Collector. He sends away the couple to a distant jail and calmly awaits the ferocious men from the North. Despite a show of strength by the first party of six the Assistant Collector, at great risk to his life, disarms them. Then he convinces them with patient argument that the claims of their honour and the law he upholds are not contradictory. He dissuades the bridegroom's party from violence by persuading them to accept, according to precedent, suitable recompense for their alleged slight. The girl's people agree to part with their centuries-old orchard, their only means of livelihood. The bridegroom humbly accepts the offer, and then generously returns the gift. The honour of each party is saved, and there is goodwill all round.

The fables are shorter than the tales and simpler, for they narrate fewer incidents.

They have familiar trappings of a fairy tale: a wise, just and benevolent king and a population which has implicit faith in him.

The subject of the fables is more than a public or administrative issue. It is often a basic question of government and statehood. The king, like the Assistant Collector, is a symbol, and two-dimensional as a character. The moral of each fable has relevance to some aspect of contemporary Indian life.

Thus, “In Being Prepared” the great king asks each household to give one or two youths for the defence of the state against a “scourge” which will come from the North East. The response is good, the youths are fighting fit by the time the scourge comes. The author moralizes through the words of the Great King, “He who in war will not change and prepare in time for new modes, new weapons, for his country there is nothing but humiliation and defeat,” This story was written long before the China-India border war. How prophetic the author’s words proved!

One of the devices the author uses to indicate that the world of the tales belongs to the past is style. The tales are written in a heavy, mannered language, which abounds in circumlocutions and deliberate inversions. The dialogue is stylized and archaic. Only a longish extract will convey the peculiar flavour of this style.

“In the late twenties of this century, on the other side of a canal from a village, twenty-five miles away from the nearest railway station, was encamped a young Assistant Collector. At 7.30 on a cold winter evening, in the snug well-lighted Swiss Cottage tent that was his itinerant home and office for weeks on end while on tour, he was engaged on the last of his tasks for the day. By the side of his table sat the Head Munshi with a pile of correspondence. On each matter he expounded the facts and sought a decision. The Assistant Collector knew the local language well and all their talk was in it. Sometimes the answer was easy and quickly given, sometimes when the Land Revenue Code, the Rules under it, the Commissioner’s Circulars were referred

to quite an argument developed on the interpretation of rule so and so or whether circular so-and-so did not in any case over-rule it.”

This sample of dialogue is fairly representative:

“God forbid, noble lady, talk not of such gruesome things’, said the Assistant Collector. ‘Rest assured while you are in this jurisdiction, you are safe. Not the tip of a hair of your head shall be touched!’”

Whether Gorwala’s experiment is a conscious one or not is neither here nor there. What is important is the question, how significant is Gorwala’s departure? Gorwala’s approach is far too inflexible to record the subtle nuances of thoughts and feelings. As a vehicle of psychological or social probing it can serve little purpose. Its chief use is as an instrument of satire. Writers are likely to resort to it more frequently in the future, almost in direct proportion to the growth in importance and power of officialdom, mass media, nocturnal gangsterism, and similar institutions which maintain a stranglehold on the life of the individual. Protest literature will find Gorwala’s mixed genre useful.

Section V

CHAPTER 11

OTHERS

(a)Sasthi Brata

The nine stories in *Encounter* were written over the years. It is good that Sasthi Brata has “nailed the date and place of composition” to each story, for this allows us to trace his development as a short story writer. The two early stories, “Encounter” and “The Wall”, written at the ages of 16 and 19 respectively, are gauche. “The Wall”, for instance, records the loneliness that follows a young man’s failure to completely possess the girl he loves. It is revealing to compare this story with “Does a Man Have to Know”, in which the experience of the former recurs with one difference. Whereas the trigger to loneliness in the former is emotional, in the latter it is sexual. Typical of many Indians in England, youthful Amit’s feeling of inadequacy is heightened when he fails, out of ignorance of female anatomy, to consummate his first experience.

Although the early stories are self conscious, all the Brata concerns are present in them : anger, indictment, frankness, unnecessarily long descriptions of the surroundings, undue attention to the manner of expression rather than the matter.

These excesses mar what is a moving story, and could have been a powerful one, written five years later, “Dead End”. Two thirds of this story, which deals with the estrangement of a young pair caused by an unwanted pregnancy, is devoted to recording the quarrels and the black moods of both the man and the woman, They are reconciled when a quack carries out an abortion.

“Wake No False Dawns” has an interesting theme which is spoiled by forced sincerity. This story describes the narrator’s marriage to an Indian girl after his return from England with the aim of being useful to his country and finding his roots. He

rebels against the fact that his bride regards herself as a daughter-in-law first and a wife next. He is irked by the fact that he cannot build a personal relationship with her because she will respond only to, respond only with the stock emotional gestures of traditional life. After her untimely death, caused by a fall during pregnancy, he leaves for England.

Although Sasthi Brata is at pains to stress in the Author's Note that the author and the narrator are not the same person, yet the evidence of the stories is to the contrary. There is very little difference between one character and another. And all of them have much in common with the self-advertisements that Sasthi Brata issues from time to time. The conclusion then is, either the characters are the author's alter egos or that Sasthi Brata is less than skilful in creating character.

Sasthi Brata is a good writer but not necessarily a good short story writer. He makes little effort to bring out the significance of an event. Worse, we have the impression that he is constantly talking round the subject. Each details appears as important as the next one. He appears to be describing episodes, with their abundance of detail rather than writing short stories. He is a little like a painter who is so taken up with colours that he forgets the canvas.

But just as a viewer may forgive this lapse in a painter because of the ingenious blend of colours, so we often go along with Sasthi Brata's verbal legerdemain. Each of the stories is written in a different style. The hesitant shy inflexions of voice in "Does a Man Have to know", reflecting the narrator's situation, contrast with the assertive even strident tones of "Gotham City Mores", indicative of the fact that the confident narrator has the measure of strange surroundings and strange people. In "Wake No False Dawns" the note is tender and nostalgic, perhaps because the story is written in the second person and addressed to the wife who failed him. "Only" is written in a mock pompous manner and it suits the subject: the circumstances of the

narrator's impetuous proposal and hurried marriage – which surprisingly has survived.

Sasthi Brata's language is so flexible that he shifts easily from raucous laughter to bawdy humour, angry denunciation to subtle irony, quiet evocation of a mood or a situation to exaggerated or theatrical posturing.

It is sad to state that language rather than the story is more important in *Encounter*.

(b) Jai Nimbkar

Jai Nimbkar is a careful writer, accomplished in technique but of limited range. Economy is the special quality of the stories brought together in *Lotus Leaves and Other Stories*. She is careful in selecting details which suggest character and atmosphere, and take the narrative forward in the minimum number of words. The sentences are short. In description, we are presented with an image, not told about a situation. She chooses her words with care to an extent that a single word may indicate a shift in nuance. The construction of the stories is neat.

“Madhukar came back into town and went straightaway to Parvati's house. He rapped on a window and called softly, ‘Paru, Paru.’

‘What are you doing here? She whispered fiercely. ‘My father will kill you’”

This is the first time Parvati is introduced in the story, yet after this dialogue we need not be told about their relationship or the background to their affair. Jai Nimbkar has gone straight into the drama of the situation.

The passage also indicates another characteristic of drama. Dialogue helps her to write half her story. As in a well-written play, a particular detail may be stated, as in the first extract below, or implied, as in the second.

“He looked round the room. The plaster was falling off the walls, the woodwork was over ornamental, now dim and dusty with the years. Even this temporary abode

bore a resemblance to her – the shabby, tasteless remains of bygone splendour.”

“He looked at he girl’s rapt face. The light of the orange shaded lamps which lit the room gave her skin a warm glow. Even her ice-blue eyes looked softer than they did in the day time, and her dark blonde head looked sleek and shining.”

Three elements combine in the description. The girl’s features are described. The atmosphere at the restaurant is evoked. An opening is created to carry the narrative forward, for the passage prepares us for the main character’s reaction. “You know you’re beautiful”, he says in the next sentence.

Jai Nimbkar’s short stories may be divided into two broad categories. Stories like “The Lotus Leaves” “A Friend of the Family”, “Metamorphosis”, examine aspects of domestic life, particularly husband-wife relationships. Most of the others deal with pressures that build up in small-town life. The pressures may be political, as in “Unto Each Man His Due”; they may be economic, as in “The Mother”; or they may be social, as in “Death of a Hero”. The categories overlap in a few stories like “Quit Yourself Like Men”, “With Intent to Kill” and “In Memoriam”.

Most of the stories repeat a common situation with a slight variation. In both “ Lotus Leaves” and “A Friend of the Family”, the husbands are men of limited interests and the wives feel that it “ is a conspiracy of men to keep women on the fringe of their lives.” In “Quit” and “ Metamorphosis” the roles are reversed. In both these stories it is the men who are the victims of delusion. In both, the men have invested their women with qualities they did not possess. Jayant’s wife in “Quit” was perhaps always petty but Jayant’s romanticism made him see her otherwise. There is no change in “Metamorphosis” as the title may lead us to believe; it is the insight the man suddenly acquires: “..at fifty, fat, physically unattractive, without the use of her legs, she (a famous singer) sat on top of the world, while he wandered about seeking out a dream of the past and truing to give it substance.”

The men in “With Intent to Kill” and “The Mother”, are presented as contrasts to one another. In the former story, Madhukar robs the caretaker of a temple so that he can elope with the girl he loves. The husband in “The Mother” refuses to so much as borrow money from his employer, despite his wife’s tearful pleading, to buy medicine for his ailing infant daughter.

The stories give no indication that this repetition is deliberate, that the author is trying to explore certain truths in a new setting. We have therefore to conclude that the author repeats situations because her experience of life is limited. Nimbkar’s concept of character is similarly narrow. Basically, she portrays one type: the disillusioned man or woman.

The choice of titles seems unusual. Only a few are apt or suggestive and none is striking. Some are like an exhortation: “Quit Yourself like Men.” “Cross Cultural Communication” sounds like a fertilizer advertisement. “Metamorphosis” reads like a slogan. “Unto Each Man His Due” and “With Intent to Kill” carry shades of the law court. A good title often indicates the theme of a story. Nimbkar’s titles seem like after-thoughts.

(c) Sujatha Bala Subrahmanian

Sujatha Bala Subramanian has twice won the Roscoe Award for the best short story in the U.K. and the Commonwealth. Of the eighteen stories in her only collection to date, *The House in the Hills*, a few have been published abroad. Among the more notable of her stories, “The Zamindar of Pallipuram” centers round the representative of a class which has been deprived of its titles but has not lost its pride. Our zamindar has a few memories to boot. Used to giving large tips, the zamindar parts even with a silver paan box his favorite mistress had given him and which symbolizes his lost youth. “Mother” is the story of a silent but dominating mother who takes her son’s separation and later his death with apparent calm. “Four Annas Worth of Curds”

presents a miser who spends, instead of the daily anna, four annas on the day he wins a lottery of ten thousand rupees, then assuages his conscience by deciding, “No butter-milk for him for four more days and the milkman’s account would be squared”. The house in “The House in the Hills” represent a clerk’s ambition; with his wife’s death, it remains a paper dream. “A Time for Hunger” is a touching story about a husband who, during a period of need, allows his wife to indulge her fancy for a small mirror with the money he gives her to buy rice.

Both Subramanian’s language and craftsmanship are marked by economy. Her writing is fluent. She writes in British English, so much so that many of her characters speak like Englishmen. Her use of the device of the “point of view” to give perspective to her characters and episodes compels attention. She uses many forms of the short story, from the straightforward narrative to slice-of-life cameos. The atmosphere of South Indian villages and small towns is recreated convincingly. A few stories reveal an engaging feminine sense of irony. Her humour is subdued. Indeed, Sujatha Bala Subrahmaian would be the complete short story writer were it not that most of her characters and almost all her situations are a bit too pat.

(d) Raji Narasimhan

The slice-of-life stories in Raji Narasimhan’s first collection, *The Marriage of Bela*, deal with the lower middle class. She adds the third dimension to her stories by choosing occasions on which her characters seek to escape the humdrumness of their lives. A few succeed, the majority have to reconcile themselves to their lot. Among the lucky few are Rani, who, in “End of Probation”, escapes the taunts of her brother by shifting into the Working Women’s Hostel after she is confirmed in her job. Similarly, Durga, in “Mother and Child”, can survive in the stifling atmosphere of her home, dominated by her husband and mother-in-law, only after she acquires a

talisman for her son from a Godman. It is pathetic that something as dubious as a talisman becomes a psychological anchor of belonging.

Few other characters are as fortunate as these ones. An increment in no way provides an escape for Krishna Sood, the ageing spinsterish counterpart of Rani in “Their Woman Colleague”, from the monotony of files and life in a government residential colony. The meager gift of the occasion is the forced banter of colleagues in a second-rate restaurant. Even the heady college romance of Suresh and Bina in the story named after them, must anti-climax into the acceptance of a demanding mother-in-law, a shabby house and a compromise here or there, even of a moral nature, just to keep going.

The tragedy of these people is that they accept their lot uncomplainingly. Often a gesture of protest is all that they have the energy for. The gesture becomes the occasion for the author to lift a momentary curtain over their drab lives. Raji Narasimhan presents the occasion by a careful selection of detail in narration, atmosphere and characterization. Even with regards to language, we have the impression that the words have been selected and set in a frame. Her writing does not have a conversational flow. The following passage illustrates most of these characteristics:

“The village was an eruption, a knot in the unwinding of tie. Against the tawny colours of earth, mud and kine loosely collaged against a low sky, a woman in dusky red homespun sat on a charpai watching them. Health visitors? Those hired busybodies come with their needles and pox vials? Or family planning genii come to meddle with their privates?”

(e) Juliette Banerjee

Juliette Banerjee writes about lower middle class Anglo-Indians and Westernized middle-class Indians in *The Boy Friend and Other Stories*. There is evidence of first

hand observation in the portrayal of these classes and in the creation of background and atmosphere. She captures the spirit of Calcutta in the desire of the wife of an ambitious executive to take lessons in spoken English so that she can attend cocktail parties. Other aspects of life in Calcutta are revealed in the efforts of an Anglo-Indian boy to become a crooner, and in the manner in which a gross rich man spends money to learn ballroom dancing so that he can attract women.

Juliette Banerjee's skill in creating character is uneven. Her female and child characters ring true, but her male characters appear flat. Arati, for example, in "You'll Always Have the Sea with You," represents the girl caught between tradition and modernity. She is happy that her honeymoon at the sea side resort is over because she cannot cope with her feelings towards an American who happens to be holidaying there.

Juliette Banerjee's stories are neither slice-of-life pieces nor plotted ones. They consist of a series of incidents working towards a point of significance, which is occasionally stated but more often suggested. "The Boyfriend" bears this out. The narrator recalls her association with a classmate who possessed what none of them had, a boy friend. In spite of going steady for a long time, the boy friend finds enough pretext not to marry Sandra. It so happens that years later the narrator's marriage is arranged with this man.

"We're happy in a placid way and just once he laughed to me about a girl who was a social nobody, and on account of whom his parents had almost sent him to England to forget.

'What happened to her?' I asked, filing my nails scrupulously.

'Don't know, probably ended up in some typists' pool somewhere.'

I murmured about seeing to the dinner and moved away.

It's only when I can't sleep at night for reasons I refuse to fathom, the tears burn

my throat and I have nothing to do but wait for the morning.”

The last paragraph is like a key that opens simultaneously the doors to the past and a window to the future. It delicately sums up the personality of the husband, and gives the reader an idea as to why the narrator is not happy in her marriage, and may never be.

Juliette Banerjee’s writing is clever, slightly involved, a little self conscious. Wit and word play add to its appeal.

(f) Saros Cowasjee

Stories and Sketches, first published in 1970, was re-issued in 1978 under the title *Nude Therapy*. The five “sketches” were left out and three new stories added to the collection. As an understandable precaution against ignorance the publishers illustrated the title with a provocative nude.

Saros Cowasjee has a broad concept of the short story form. This is evident in a story like, “A Short Story,” which describes a man settling down to write a story and racking his brains for a subject. The paper remains blank, but the author’s short story has been written.

Yet Saros Cowasjee draws a line between ‘stories’ and ‘sketches’. By his own implicit definition at least two of his ‘sketches’ – “In a Holy Home” and “Sunday on a Soapbox” – would qualify as short stories. These two sketches are better than some of his carefully worked out stories. The term ‘sketches’ suits pieces like, “Dublin, Farewell” and “A Day in Dublin” which are travel articles really. Both record the author’s impressions of Dublin and its lovable inhabitants.

Despite the broad concept, Saros Cowasjee’s theme is narrow. Most of the short stories bring out the irony of circumstances. In “His Father’s Medals” Ramu, the sweeper boy goes to buy a present with his savings or the girl who has jilted him, is

grabbed by the police as a thief, and the bronze and silver medals his father left him are taken away. In “Another Train To Pakistan”, an Anglo-Indian engineer goes to Pakistan during partition in search of security while his brother crosses into India for the same reason. They meet at a railway station.

Since the situation created by the irony of circumstances is a convenient frame for a story, and it is easily acquired, much depends upon the writer’s skill to turn a run-of-the-mill Sunday newspaper feature into a human document. Unfortunately Cowasjee’s didactic purpose is not sufficiently clothes in fictional garb. Not that Saros Cowasjee is incapable of doing so, as a comparison between “Another Train To Pakistan” and “The Chowkidar” shows. Both the stories are set in the riot-torn days of Partition. In “Another Train To Pakistan” Leslie and his wife, Irene, embody the opposing arguments of the Anglo-Indian’s dilemma, and they fail to come alive as characters. The incidents too are chosen to illustrate the author’s didactic purpose. In “The Chowkidar”, on the other hand, the young Muslim represents both a liberal type and a character whose hardening to fear and death is psychologically convincing. In this story intention and execution are blended skillfully.

On the credit side, there is the satire and sympathy of “His Father’s Medals”: sympathy for the underdog; satire against the British, the superciliousness of the caste Hindus, and the highhandedness of the police. There are also the profiles of a number of amusing speakers at Hyde Park Corner of “Sunday on a Soapbox” (one speaker describes his quest to discover the sex of God). “In a Holy Home” draws warm rather than satirical portraits of an eccentric landlord and his wife, who “were willing to go any length to see me happy, but they made sure that no expense was involved.” Then there is a rich, subtle story like “My Shikari’s Wife” which suggests the faint stirrings of passion in the hearts of an amateur hunter and his tracker’s wife. Finally, there is the natural English of all the stories with its undercurrent of satire and

humour.

(g) S.B. Capoor

A Woman's Tears and Other Stories by S.B. Capoor brings together an impressive array of types including princelings, petty industrialists and faith healers, apart from government officials. The common sights of the Indian countryside and the pattern of life in the small towns of the Himalayan foothills, with their romantic names, Kasauli, Solan and Simla, form the familiar yet exotic backgrounds to the stories.

Unfortunately, the types do not ignite into life and the backgrounds are no more than decorative settings. They remain the encounters of a varied life. The mind is engaged by what the eye can see; the sensitive surface does not suggest the iceberg below.

Such a view finds the anecdotal form of the short story congenial, and most of Capoor's stories are anecdotal, though he tries his hand at other forms also. The impact of most of the stories is not sharp. The trouble lies, as indeed it does in most of Capoor's stories, with the endings. They are limp. We have the impression that Capoor was struck by an idea but in working it out he lost control somewhere.

The advantages of a tight rein are shown up in a number of light-hearted stories dealing with domestic comedy. Starting with the bickering of husband and wife, Capoor contrives situations which cause embarrassment all round. In "DDT", for example, a nagging wife is shocked to find her asthmatic husband dispensing medicine to an asthmatic thief who has come to rob them.

Capoor is at his best in one story, "Jasmine and Ashes", in which domestic comedy blends with pathos. Set in a sanatorium, the story describes the effect the death of a pretty girl has on the inmates, particularly on the narrator. Depressed, he wonders whether life has any purpose at all. A common human gesture provides the

answer and restores his faith.

Strangely enough, this is one of the few collections of Indian short stories in English which sold out almost an entire edition within a short time of its publication.

(h) Nergis Dalal

The mark of the journalist is evident in Nergis Dalal's first collection of stories, *The Nude*, as it was in her novels, *Minari*, *The Sisters*, and *The Inner Door*. Development is rapid. Everything is briefly stated. The stories are neatly constructed. The clues are planted in the right places.

The language, similarly, is functional. It is precise; it has a streak of subdued humour; the images are apt. Dialogue is to the point, and there is no attempt to suggest character by means of individual turns of phrase.

Everything, the tone, the approach, the choice of subjects, suggests good manners. Even sex and violence are treated with decorum, as in "The Nude" and "The Sacrifice".

Unfortunately, Nergis Dalal's facility serves little purpose. The stories have nothing to say. Her men and women have strayed out of the works of well known writers. To take two examples, Nina, in "The Beautiful One", that combination of beauty and no brains, who flits from husband to husband, and, fortunately, discovers the difference between love and happiness, and Harold Jerrold, in "The Alabaster Goddess", who murders a nagging wife and becomes a priest in an obscure Himalayan village, where he fulfils his life's ambition of writing a history of the Mughal Empire, are diluted distillations of Maugham and Kipling.

Most of the other characters are mere names. We are never sure of where they belong. We need a clue, less for parochial reasons, more to feel a sense of authenticity. The few exceptions reinforce this impression. Miss Turner, the calm spinister who

satirizes the inhabitants of a small town in a novel in “The Red Pavilion”, and old Miss Krishna, the kleptomaniac, who pilfers a clock from the narrator, then wills her possessions to her, are less shadowy than the other characters because they can be identified as the inhabitants of an hill station.

Nevertheless, a number of stories hold interest, namely, “A Taste of Blood”, “The Nude”, which won the first prize in a nation-wide contest, and “The Sacrifice”, which won a prize abroad. The most appealing story, however, is “The Exiles”, which studies the frame of mind of an English boxwallah couple returning home for good. Although everyone among their circle of acquaintances apparently envies them, Mr. and Mrs Wain dread the cold and bleak prospect ahead. The garland of marigold, customary on every social occasion, which had hitherto irritated Mrs Wain, becomes, as she lovingly fingers it for the last time, the symbol of the mixture of attraction and repulsion that India exercised on them.

Nergis Dalal has technical skill and a facile pen. Her stories make the surface the whole of life, and mistake the cliché for the truth.

SECTION VI: An Extended Spring

Chapter I

During the eighties the parameters of personal and social freedom widened. The economic and political conditions were harbingers of the liberalization that was to occur in the nineties. By the turn of the century India, a developed country by then, was ready to export information technology, skills and personnel. The Indian Short Story in English imbibed the spirit of the times and registered commanding and confident growth.

The two words that best describe the stories of the period between 1980 and 2008 are burgeoning creativity. The range in theme, subject, characterization and backgrounds is extremely wide. The age-old debate of tradition versus modernity remains but the writers approach it from new angles. With Indian expertise in demand overseas, a growing body of stories compare the lives of Indians at home and abroad. Women's lives are the preoccupation of many writers. The concern still is how family and society treats them but the new element is the response of the women themselves, which is different from that of their sisters in the earlier decades. The growing respect women have for themselves is reflected in the stories of today

The story writers of the eighties and the nineties play around with new and unusual situations. Temsula Ao examines life lived in abnormal conditions in a land torn by clashes between guerrillas and the army.

The leaps in imagination are no longer the prerogative of a few writers only. Structure is as moveable as stage props in the hands of writers; a good example of this is Daina Romany.

The role of the city in shaping personality has been given greater recognition. Vikram Chandra, Lavanya Sankaran, Amit Chaudhuri, among others,

treat Bombay, Bangalore and Calcutta almost as characters in their stories. Writers like Radhika Jha set their stories in locales in various parts of the country. Nonda Chatterjee in *The Strawberry Patch* chooses backgrounds from 19th century British India to Rewa in the 1950s.

Gay men have found their poet laureate in R.Raja Rao. This period threw up our own budding Agatha Christie in Kalpana Swaminathan whose *Cryptic Death* is a collection of detective stories. In a writer like Manjula Padmanabhan the word variety acquires a new meaning: for her variety includes science fiction, fantasy, mystery, homosexuality, besides the usual subjects.

Further, this variety is rich in depth too. Many writers have looked with courage and honesty at their own communities. Nisha Da Cunha writes about the ambiguities of being an Anglo Indian, part of two cultures, belonging to neither. Meher Pestonji takes up cudgels against the materialistic and insular Parsi community. Susan Visvanathan deals with the pull migration and home exert on Keralites, particularly the Syrian Christian community. Sangita Wadhwani writes about the community “with dollar signs in their eyes”- the Sindhis. Esther David narrates the Indian Jewish experience

If proof is needed that the short story is an everyman’s art, it is provided by those who took to the pen in the eighties and nineties. Look at the background of a few of these writers. Anita Nair describes herself as a “part time parent, part time copy writer and full time epicure.” Diana Romany works as a consultant for a publishing house and “moonlights as a bartender during Christmas.” Tara Deshpande was a model, a stage actress and a movie star before the death of her father moved her to ponder questions like fifty and done ? (*Fifty and Done* was the title she gave her collection.)

More women are writing short stories now than at any other time previously.

That has been one of the gifts of feminism to literature.

A fact that stares us in the face is that the current crop of writers reveal a high degree of technical maturity. It is as if each of them had honed their skill at characterization, pacing and structure in some writers' workshop of the mind.

And by now English is so flexible in their hands that a nuance is merely a flick in a Tendulkar wrist, and the writers can achieve any effect they desire with brevity and beauty.

The number of prizes Indian short story writers have won is not only a measure but a recognition of their imaginative and expressive powers. To mention a few at random, Vikram Chandra won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Eurasia region for his collection of stories. Shree Ghatage's collection *Awake When All the World is Asleep* won the Thomas H. Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award in 1998, and was nominated in the same year for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award, the Newfoundland and Labrador Book Award and one other award. Githa Hariharan has won the Commonwealth Prize. Anjana Appachana bagged the O. Henry Festival Prize. The number of individual stories which have won awards or have been nominated is legion.

Translation and adaptation are other measures of quality and acceptability. A number of collections, including Anjana Appachana's maiden offering, have been translated into foreign languages.

Section VI

CHAPTER 1

A). Vikram Chandra

Vikram Chandra has carried forward the techniques of the traditional Indian tales of the *Katha-Sarita-Sagara* without strain into stories of contemporary life in *Love and Longing in Bombay*, his only collection to date. The five stories in the collection unfold in a wheel-within-a-wheel format, with one story curving out into the next and along the way spawning shorter narratives. Since fusion is all the rage now, the five stories pull together an eclectic range of apparently diverse themes: a satire on high society, a detective story which rises above the generic, ghosts, the criminal underground, the various nuances of love and longing, and the spirit of a city. Bombay is indeed almost a character in these stories.

The titles of the five stories are Dharma, Shakti, Kama, Artha, and Shanti, which stand respectively for duty, power, passion or sex, wealth and peace. These stories are linked in a number of ways: first by the narrator Ranjit and his friend Subramaniam; second, all of them illustrate the themes of the titles; third, the stories work out, in some cases literally, in others ironically, what Hindu scriptures prescribe as the goals of life.

The theme of duty is worked out in the story of a retired major general's responsibility to his family house in Khar. Major General Jehangir (Jago) Antia confronts the phantom pain of his missing leg as well that of a real phantom in his nearly deserted family house. The story shows great descriptive powers. The battlefield scenes of his army days are evoked with the same power as the small house he now occupies and its surroundings.

Strength or Shakti is the driving force of an ordinary girl, a social climber who succeeds in her aim of finding acceptance in high society. Sheila Bijlani is a

pretty flight attendant who marries a wealthy man. She is ridiculed by the women who belong to this circle. The satire is in the fights, grouses and trivial triumphs of the nouveau riche. Sheila's son and her rival's daughter fall in love. There is opposition from the girl's family but Sheila finds ways to overcome the factors that stand in the way of the happiness of the families. Although the story has the ingredients of a Hindi movie, the language, as in *Dharma*, lifts the story above cliché.

Kama, the story about a Sikh policeman Sartaj Singh, moves on two levels. One level shows his personal life, his passion, his rich sex life and the disintegration of his marriage. The other level shows his professional life. Sartaj Singh is investigating the death of a rich man whose body is found in a drain after a strong downpour. The investigation unravels the sleaze hidden in an ordinary couple's life. The professional constraints of an honest policeman add to the failures in his personal life. The story holds the tension between passion unmatched and limited power.

Artha, with irony in its title, shows how lack of money leads to the loss of friends and lovers. It centres around two gay men Iqbal and Rajesh. Both live with their parents who have no clue about their sons' orientation. The two friends meet in parks and crowded buses to fulfill their longing for each other. Their isolation from society is highlighted by the woman who discriminates on the basis of religion and orthodoxy. One of them struggles hard to make money so that they can afford some private living space. The story of the woman who employs Iqbal forms the sub plot of the story.

A lonely railway station is the backdrop against which the story of Shanti, a woman searching for her husband, missing in action, and a youngman, Shiv, who desires her, is worked out.

It is not only the structure of the traditional tale which holds these stories together but Vikram Chandra's talent which controls the pace, slips in telling detail

unobtrusively, keeps expectation at a high level, presents richly developed characters and delivers Graham Greenish entertainment among other literary delights.

B. Amit Chaudhuri

Amit Chaudhuri's *Real Time: Stories and a Reminiscence* belongs to the Chekov lineage. Amit Chaudhuri writes slice-of-life sketches, impressions of events, happenings in which memories of the past loop in and out of what is taking place in the present.

The approach that works so well in his novels is brought to bear on the stories in *Real Time*, but the results are uneven. In these stories, Amit Chaudhuri compresses a life time in a few pages, focusing on a significant moment in a character's life and then returning a decade or two later to show how that event affected the course of his life. Interwoven in this flow of events and memories are cameos of life in the city, especially Calcutta, highlighting the changes that time has wrought in its social life and *mores*. Since Chaudhuri's characters are drawn mainly from the upper classes, the stories reflect the changes in their life style.

In "Portrait of an Artist," the narrator and his cousin are shown as teenagers, one dreaming of literary success, the other tossing between a career in science and commerce. One goes to school in England and leaves India forever. The other stays on in Calcutta, joins his father's business and becomes part of a theater troupe with political leanings.

In "Four Days before the Saturday-Night Social" the first shot is of a half a dozen adolescents getting ready for a high school dance. The narrative catches up with them years later when they have moved to different cities, in India and overseas.

The order of presentation is reversed in "Words, Silences". A sexual encounter way back in the past colors the meeting of two friends as grown ups.

"The Old Masters" shows how time changes the course of life for two friends.

One climbs the corporate ladder to become the company's GM, another loses his job and joins a small company making everyday appliances. The course of the GM's life receives a jolt when his son rejects the family tradition to go into business and sets his heart on studying music. The GM almost reaches the position of his friend the appliance maker, as the cost of his son's education nearly bankrupts him.

On one level "The Party" is sketch of a person seeking approval in a conversation with the bored son of his boss. The sketch gains depth once the reader realizes that the setting is the Emergency and grasps that the characters are living in a cocoon, divorced from the reality outside their walls. Similarly in "White Lies" an understanding of the aspects in which music can affect people - as a passion, as a fashion, as a social skill or just as a profession - turns what begins as a quietly comic account of a rich housewife's relationship with her music teacher into a story of lost illusions and compromises, the white lies people tell themselves and others in order to keep going from day to day.

Behind the domestic disagreements, rivalries between neighbors and co-workers, the concerns about appropriate behaviour at the *shraddha* of a suicide or at a woman's second wedding, there lies disappointment and unfulfilled desires. The refusal of the protagonists to give in quietly to their circumstances turns them into believable characters

Strangely, the approach which works so well in Amit Chaudhuri's better stories, and indeed in his novels, does not make an impression in the slighter pieces in the collection. In these stories the series of fragmentary happenings fail to click or create a pattern, perhaps because the waves they send out are too weak to register on the reader's antennae. The drawback with the slice-of-life approach is that if the reader has not been sufficiently tuned in by the other aspects of the author's skill, it can easily slip into a parody of itself.

C).Lavanya Sankaran

The real heroine of Lavanya Sankaran's *The Red Carpet* is the city of Bangalore. Bangalore unfurls the red carpet to both tradition and change. Contrasts don't clash in these stories, they carry the stories forward. For example, D'Costa and Gnanakan, two retirees, accept the T-shirt clad engineers, investment bankers and nerds who bring global trends and "computerese" to their neighbourhood. The chauffeur, Ramu, may disapprove of the fast life and manner of dress of his female employer but he does approve of her concern for his wife, his parents and their humble home.

"Self-deprecation appeared modern, with its blue jeans and infotech ways, but was actually a very old courtesy. Deride yourself so that others may praise you. "A character in one of the stories, Priyamavada, is the ultimate metaphor for Bangalore: America-trained but at home in traditional festivities.

D). Radhika Jha

Radhika Jha in *The Elephant and the Maruti* takes intriguing situations and sets off characters against them. The interaction reveals unsuspected aspects in both the situations and the characters and the question arises who is influencing whom? Sushila, the child-wife weaves pleasant dreams from a pile of garbage and hopes for a bright future unlike hers for her yet to be conceived child. In another story, Manoj Mishra gives up his PhD and moves with his wife to be part of an institute that perfects artificial insemination, fertilizing the Indian cow with European sperm so the cow produces more milk to end poverty in the villages. In Nandpur, a village which has consciously decided to turn it's back on modernity, Ramu the village idiot, sneaks off and marries a beautiful educated girl, Laxmi. A few weeks later he finds an

abandoned cow in the forest and adopts it. The two unlikely couples meet when Manoj inseminates Ramu's useless cow with European bull sperm and they rush headlong towards a confrontation in which what is at stake is not a cow or a human, but the identity of Nandpur, and of India, itself. In one story the direction the eruption of communal passions that takes place in a sleepy South Indian town is as unexpected as the consequences of the collision between an elephant and a Maruti car in the title story. Ingenuity forms the dough and the yeast of most of Jha's stories.

E). Manjula Padmanabhan

Manjula Padmanabhan in *Kleptomania: Ten Stories* reveals a highly playful imagination. Behind the narrative extravaganza lurks a moral concern. Gandhi-toxin 2099 links Gandhi's philosophy to genetic cloning in an India that has suffered a nuclear fallout; the story also reflects the concern of Padmanabhan over nuclear proliferation. Sharing Air pictures a future without trees and expresses the author's fear of unchecked deforestation and pollution. The Body in the Backyard, ostensibly about an unsolved murder, deals with the way the social standing of a male affects the sexual impulse in a woman.

Although these examples give the impression of a deadly serious writer, Padmanabhan's approach belies this conclusion. Her writing is fanciful, light-hearted, witty and satirical. The following passage is fairly typical of her writing: "I concluded that there were two speeds of sex: first world and third world. Only wealthy and glamorous individuals had first world sex. The rest of us made do with the third world variety: at best reproductive, at worst perfunctory."

F). Shree Ghatage

In the eleven stories in *Awake when all the World is Asleep*, Shree Ghatage

examines the demands of tradition, family obligations and personal freedom on an individual. This is especially true of Shaila, who, in love with a Canadian, returns to Bombay to celebrate her father's 60th birthday only to find that her parents are arranging a marriage for her. Sarla in the title story, has no choice but to accept her husband's indifference to her even though she is prepared to be a door mat.

The characters in these stories are ordinary people, inhabitants of an apartment complex in Bombay, but the real action takes place in their inner lives as they face their fears and disappointments. The stories are linked by the characters who reappear in various stories but the linking serves no purpose as it does in Vikram Chandra's stories.

G). Diana Romany.

In one of the stories in, *Spoonful of Grey*, the photograph that Joseph carries of his lost love shows not a portrait nor a full length figure but a fragment: just a hand. The fragment could well be the motif of all the stories. These are stories of lives viewed in bits and parts: people see each other in a café or in passing; shadows briefly registering on other shadows. Likewise the thoughts as well as the feelings of these characters are fleeting, incomplete. They try to make friends, share laughter and happiness briefly, and move on to repeat these moments in other places, with other people. There seem to be no lasting relationships.

On the surface the stories in this collection may appear disjointed, but because common characters, particularly one called Natasha, pass through different stories in the collections, the fragments can be put together as in a jigsaw puzzle. Thus, at one point Natasha sees Nicholas and Nicholas remembers seeing her under the streetlights. Joseph the bass player, comes to know Natasha from the diary he finds. Susan, a student having an affair with a professor turns out to be a classmate of Natasha's. It is

when we have pieced together the fragments that we discover the uniqueness, the individuality, below the uniformity of modern life. Diana Romany uses the stuff of advertisements, the names of everyday products and brand names as symbols for the sameness, the face of modern existence.

H). R Raja Rao

Gay writing in India has found a pioneering voice in R.Raja Rao. The fifteen stories in *One Day I Locked My Flat* in Soul City deal mainly with various aspects of the man-to-man relationships. The dilemmas that these men face are treated with understanding and laced with humor. It is humor that emphasizes that the world of such men is as normal as that of heterosexual men. “Moonlight Tandoori” exemplifies this approach. In this story an Indian student in England falls in love with a heterosexual Bangladeshi boy. The reaction between the two is conveyed by means of silence, meaningful smiles, intimacy and feelings of repulsion. “Confessions of a Lover Boy” is the story of a man who continues to long for a man who has fallen out of love with him. The exchange of letters between the two men forms the body of the story. It is an eye-opening fact that the gamut of emotion gay men experience is wide –indifference, ridicule, rejection, abuse and even violence. R.Raja Rao’s collection allows gay men to take their rightful place in the world’s character gallery.

I). Temsula Ao

These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone by Temsula Ao is the first collection of stories, indeed any form of fiction, to emerge from Nagaland; it is also the first work of fiction by a Naga writer.

The British never formally conquered the group of scattered tribes living in the Naga Hills. The Nagas under Angami Zapu Phizo pulled down the Indian flag on the

day of Indian independence in 1947. They refused to participate in the 1952 elections and formally declared independence in 1956. The Indian army was deployed to quell the uprising. Guerrilla warfare in a heightened or subdued form has been a fact of life in Nagaland until recently.

The stories in this collection depict the trauma borne by ordinary people, particularly women, caught in the crossfire, both literally and figuratively. The stories are not gloomy; they show how resilient women can be in difficult conditions. Inmala in "The Night" stands up to the village council to vindicate herself: she is not the unwed mother of a "fatherless" child. The adolescent girl in "The Journey" rises above the insult of being rejected by her boyfriend. Sentila's mother in "The Pot Maker" wants her daughter to be weaver but Sentila perseveres to become an accomplished pot maker like her mother. Merenla, who grows pumpkins, welcomes the opportunities the insurgency sends her way. Punaba in "The Jungle Major" uses her wits to save her husband from the clutches of the army. Apenyo continues to sing even as she is gang raped in a church, and becomes the stuff of legend: "on certain nights a "peculiar wind blows through the village" and the old storyteller chides a group of youngsters that they "have forgotten how to listen to the voice of the earth and the wind".

The stories also deal with other aspects of the insurgency. Idealism: abandoning family, school, jobs, careers to become guerillas. Cynicism: "self-seeking entrepreneurs" using the government's largesse to spy on the guerrillas. Loyalty: Satemba in "The Curfew Man" forced to spy for the state not yet ready to betray the cause.

The background, the events, the situations and characters are unusual and could stand by themselves; the author's political and social commentary need not have been added.

J). Githa Hariharan

The twenty stories Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying* are a like a pot of tea in which Darjeeling, Assam, Sri Lankan orange pekoe and jasmine tea leaves have been subtly and skillfully blended. One can dissect a story but will never be able to put one's finger on what creates the final effect. Perhaps it is Githa Hariharan's haunting metaphors which move the stories forward. Her story, "The Remains of the Feast", where an old woman feels the urge to savor all the foods she has missed or been forbidden to eat combines toned -down comedy with pathos and sympathy

K). Anita Nair

Anita Nair has a sharp eye and a quick wit. In the title story in *Satyr of the Subway*, a lonely middle aged artist eyes "the wave of waists" that pass through the New York subway. He is looking for the perfect navel, his epitome of a perfect maiden. He does find her, woos her, seduces her and in pouring himself into her navel desecrates the "ultimate orifice."

Sarah in "A Thanksgiving Tale", lonely like the Satyr, is searching too. But what she craves is acceptance. She invites herself over to an erstwhile neighbor's Thanksgiving dinner as a desperate step. She does everything wrong and returns home seeking escape from further inadequacy – in death. Anita Nair's endings somehow dissipate the playful energy of her stories .

L). Vijay Lakshmi

Vijay Lakshmi uses the symbolism of the pomegranate cleverly contrasts in the eight stories she has brought together in *Pomegranate Dreams and Other Stories*. The pomegranate stands for fertility, abundance; its seeds suggest renewal; yet, as the

Sanskrit idiom says, biting into the pomegranate requires effort. The contradictory significance of the fruit, the ying and yang of abundance and adversity, becomes a metaphor for contrasting ways of thinking and living, particularly among immigrants. Her characters stand at various point of assimilation, acceptance, on the curve between Indian and foreign particularly American culture. Characters try to balance their spiritual yearnings with the demands of materialism; they examine the demands their life as professionals makes on them; an Indian immigrant compares her experience with a Russian immigrant. In the title story a girl from Jaipur, Juhi tries to adjust to life in Philadelphia and wonders what is the price one must pay to achieve the American dream. Vijay Lakshmi's endings are intelligent; she plucks characters from their surroundings and in the end she lets them merge back into them. The story is not packaged and the endings are not artificially tied up.

M). Esther David

The women in Esther David's *By the Sabarmati* are disadvantaged. The stories are about their efforts to survive in a hard world. David draws their circumstances with sympathy and the narration of the each story is carried forward in an individual voice. All is not gloom. The individual voices do succeed in conveying tones of resignation, sadness, the desire to rise above one's circumstances and the will to fight. There are glimpses of happiness too in this generally bleak world. David could have expanded a number of stories, particularly those with rounded characters in the midst of interesting circumstances.

N). Sangeeta Wadhwani

Wit, verbal jugglery and a satirical outlook are the eye-catching features in most of the stories in *Shakti in the City*. The social climber, Mrs. Boshiani, in "Birds of a

Feather” gets her come-uppance in the midst of Bombay’s glitterati when she slips up and reveals that she is not old money but a receptionist from Sri Lanka who married a rich Sindhi. The old woman in “Nani Waits for Godot” initiates her granddaughter in the Sindhi credo:”naukri, goo ji tokri – a job is as good as carrying a load of shit on your head. A girl is lucky when and if she is born rich and marries a good businessman who can take care of her needs.” The good businessman in “Boy O Boy” makes no bones about how he views his six daughters who have to be dowried off – *peraaas*, which can be translated as “dead stock,” headaches” “pains in the butt” The flash, the cultivation of the good life, the love of money, ostentation, and the enterprise of this community come through in these stories. These traits of her community do not upset Sangeeta Wadhvani, as they do Meher Pestonji, but give her targets for playful comedy.

O). Anjana Appachana

Masks and what lies behinds the mask interest Anjana Appachana in *Incantations and Other Stories*. In the title story, Giti has to maintain the lie of the respectability of the family she has married into. Two days before her wedding, Giti is raped by her brother-in-law. After marriage the brother-in-law continues to rape her during the day and her husband during the night. Her parents notice Giti’s depression but do nothing to confront her in-laws. The solution they decide on comes too late and achieves nothing: by then Giti has killed both herself and her brother-in-law.

“Bahu “ is also about respectability. The mother-in-law does not wish to relinquish her hold over the household even though her son marries out of love. The barbs of the mother-in-law are subtle in the beginning but grow in intensity, especially since the mama’s boy ignores the indignities his wife has to suffer. In not giving the daughter-in-law a name, Appachana makes her representative of the Indian bahu; in

making her walk out on her in-laws she celebrates the spirit of the emerging breed of bahus.

Hypocrisy often occasions comedy and this is true of a number of Appachana's stories; "When Anklets Twinkle" shows how prejudice can come a cropper. Restrain is the overriding characteristic of Appachana's stories.

P).Meher Pestonji

Meher Pestonji in *Mixed Marriage and Other Parsi Stories* gives non-Parsis the role of a sort of Greek chorus in her stories. The purpose of the chorus is to shed light on the attitudes, behaviour patterns and the ethnic personality traits of the Parsis.

As seen through the eyes of Theresa, a German sociology student documenting the lives of the street children in "Outsider", the Parsis are insular and the men are materialistic and pleasure-loving. The lives of the women "centre around imported cosmetics, French perfumes and Swiss chocolates and cheese ". The wealthy Parsis meet each week for dinner at one another's place; the conversation is banal and insensitive and the jokes repetitive. The charity of the Parsis extends only to their own kind.

Savita, the Hindu wife of Cyrus is the indigenous counterpart of Theresa. She is a feisty individual who makes reasonable efforts to blend into the family while defending the values of her tradition but the divide becomes apparent when she cannot join her daughter on the pandal during the latter's nayjote ceremony Meher Pestonji places non-Parsi characters in parallel situations to show that other Indian communities have the failings too, to a greater or lesser degree. For example, Gitanjali, (a member of the chorus) Savita's friend, is ostracized by her own family for marrying a Christian. Meher Pestonji's criticism of the Parsis merely

reflects the human condition.

Q). Susan Visvanathan

Susan Visvanathan could have as easily called her collection of fifteen stories, *Something Barely Remembered* "At Home and Abroad". The stories deal with the fascination of the Keralite with enjoying the excitement and freedoms of living abroad while hankering for the gentle obscurity in the unchanging backwaters of home. Visvanathan's touch is light but the quick strokes gives glimpses of the history of Kerala, of the relations between its various religious and social communities, of the personalities and fates of relatives abroad, and the superstitions which govern rural life.

R). Nisha Da Cunha

Nostalgia is the overriding emotion in Nisha Da Cunha's stories. In Da Cunha's stories, we meet ordinary people dealing with longing, sorrow, grief and disillusionment, loss, despair and letting go. They are soaked in melancholy and have a wistful and fragile delicacy. They tell of illness, abandonment, and death in different places, Goa, Mussoorie, Mumbai. Tragedy and suffering occur in story after story. In "Old Cypress" the middle-aged female protagonist is abandoned by her husband of many years. "Allegra" is series of letters, most written by a young, paralyzed and bedridden character to her mama. In "The Quiet of the Birds" Safia, a motherless child is brought up by an obsessive father. Safia cannot cope after her father's death. In "The Permanence of Grief" a dead pet dog casts its shadow on the lives of a brother and a sister. El in "African Bird" loses a leg. The protagonist in "Down and Out, Washing up with Gladys" witnesses a self administered abortion. In "Autumn on a Summer's Day",

a middle-aged man has to live with the suffering of his wife's terminal illness. The middle-aged woman in "There are no Brownies in St. Anthony", is recently bereaved. Da Cunha draws heavily on memory

One story deals with being an older woman who let her young lover go 'for his sake' only to discover that she condemned him to a lifetime of loneliness. A number of stories centre round the predicament of being Anglo-Indian, with a foot in each culture, belonging to neither. The stories are sensitive rather than sentimental and the writing clear but dramatic. There are a few stories which are light-hearted. One of them is "Teachers Day" which is a mild satire on the education system.

S). RISHI REDDI

Rishi Reddi, in *Karma and Other Stories*, writes about the lives of the various generations of Indian immigrants in the United States. Her spectrum includes the new arrivals, the first generation immigrants who have lived long enough in the country to regard it as home, and the second generation Indian Americans who try to balance life at home as their parents expect them to live with their lives outside home where they wish to appear American.

The older characters, mainly those who move to the new country at the invitation of their children, put a good face over their displacement. They are lonely, they are haunted by memories of the good life they had at home, they try to adjust to the weather, they have to pretend, for the sake of their children, that they have adjusted. One of the horns of their linguistic dilemma and isolation is that while they find it hard to understand the American accent they hear everyday, the Americans don't follow their Indian accents.

"Justice Shiva Ram Murthy", which was included in *The Best American Short Stories in 2005*, is about a seventy year old judge who has a hard time accepting the

fact that he has to live without the respect and adulation he enjoyed back in India. He is a vegetarian. He sets up a routine with another elderly Indian to meet in the cafes. A misunderstanding with a waitress creates a rift between him and his friend and sets him on course to rectify the imagined wrong done to him by the waitress. Murthy's personality, particularly his irascible nature, is subtly rounded off by his reactions to his surroundings.

Lakshmi, in "Lakshmi and the Librarian," has lived the life of a traditional, submissive housewife and mother. Her children are grown up now. She allows herself time to do her own thing, one of which is to strike up friendship with the local librarian. The librarian pays her the attention her husband never did. She finds herself being tempted into an affair, but he pulls herself back into her sheltered life.

Although 16 year old Uma, in "Devadasi", stands midway on the spectrum she feels the need to tread carefully when she takes a trip to India. Thoughts her American boyfriend's reaction fill her mind when she weighs how she is expected to behave around her relatives. Wisdom in the form of her dance teacher shows her the way.

The fourteen year old in "Krishna" is also caught in this no-man's land between two cultures. Son of a wealthy businessman, he attends a private school in Kansas. The balancing act he has to perform is to reconcile his efforts at trying to be like his other teenaged classmates, while privately lamenting not only their ignorance, but also of his teachers, of Indian culture.

Rishi Reddi's is an addition to the growing voices of writers who write about change and adjustment in the new world.

T) Sheela Jaywant

The middle class is Sheela Jaywant's domain in *Quilted*. The story "The Happy Diwali" lauds the housewife who ensures that the occasion becomes a joyous one for

the family, in spite of its difficulties. “Wrinkled Times” is a commentary on senior citizens who have no family or government support and have to handle their loneliness alone. In “Alone no More”, taking up gardening as a hobby helps a woman to come out of depression.

Sheela Jaywant’s exposition is straight, point a to point z; her language is without frills; the characters are not complex.

U). Uma Parameswaran

How immigrants relate to their surroundings is the underlying strain of Uma Parameswaran's collection *Fighter Pilots Never Die*. Outward they pattern their lives on those of their neighbors; some identify completely; others know that there is an unspoken difference. This is brought strongly in the stories set in Canada. The Indians are well-to-do; they relate well to other Canadians, but when a crisis occurs, they turn inwards, to their own. The crises often have a domino effect. A good example is the story a character who is lead to reflect on the state of her marriage when news comes that a friend has divorced.

Memory plays a big part in the psyche of people caught between two cultures. It provides the inner drama of an immigrant’s life. Even an every incident can trigger memory; how much more a special event like a daughter’s marriage; and when there is a crisis, memory provides a refuge and solace.

Uma Parameswaran writing is unobtrusive, but compelling, flexible but not plotted, slicing into a life at a certain point of time, slipping out quietly after revealing a chunk of the character’s existence.

(v) Shinie Antony

Shinie Antony announces her intention in the sub title of her collection, *Planet Polygamous, 36 Tales of Infidelity*: her plays around with the concept. She creates

situations which throw up various facets of infidelity. Her stories can be read as a rollicking ride over the consequences refracted by each facet. Bodies, body parts and body less souls figure prominently in the stories. There is humor, but it is black. The stories start in reality, but dimensions other than the third swing through the events. A rollicking ride by definition has to be a short one. That is why Antony's shorter stories, hold our attention. The longer ones meander.

In her other collection, *Barefoot and Pregnant*, Shinie Antony turns our stereotypes about motherhood upside down. Some of her characters don't want to be mothers; some are forced to be; some find out, after the fact, that the role does not suit them. Motherhood as celebration does not exist here. The stories depict feminism gone sour.

In her latest collection, published in 2008, *Séance on a Sunday*, Shinie Antony goes beyond sticking to one theme. The stories in this collection deal with a wider variety of theme. 'Overheard' is an excellent piece on stray conversations without any connection between them. These are 26 separate monologues that talk about things that an ordinary person goes through everyday. 'The Sofa' is a poignant story about old age and the tussle between parental love and marital amity. 'Séance on a Sunday Afternoon' deals with despair, futility and ennui. Suicide appears to be the only answer to a life lived without hope.

W).BIKIKALALOO TARIANG

Native voices from India's troubled North Eastern States are now standing up to share their experiences in English. Temsula Ao from Nagaland and Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, with collections of short stories, led the way. Khypham Singh Nongkyrih with his collections of poems and R.G Lyngdoh, a youthful musician and politician, with his novel, *Who the Cap, Fits* opened the innings for the Khasis of

Meghalaya. Bikika Laloo Tariatang is the next batswoman in with *Dad and the Salesman*, a collection of short stories.

Tariatang has an eye for the colorful personality. Dad's boastful and pompous personality comes out, much to the discomfort of his daughters, when a salesman comes calling to sell a vacuum cleaner. In "Family Matters" the narrator fills in the character of her superstitious, controlling, gossip of a sister-in-law with a number of events. An orphaned cousin who expresses herself by communicating her deepest feelings through notes in her learner's English, brightens the lives of a family of three in the story, "That Imp of a Cousin." A teacher taking a refresher course sketches the personalities of her classmates by their manner of speaking English and their demeanor in "Classmates." "Everybody Knows Martha" sketches out a type whose purpose in life seems to be to ingratiate herself with everybody. "When you were around Martha you felt like the most important person in the world."

Tariatang shows maturity when, on the one hand, she lists the ignorance of fellow Indians about the people of the North East in "My Own Country," while, on the other, she holds up the insecurities and prejudice of the locals in "My Friends and Me," as they mob and attack "udkhars", outsiders settled in Shillong, who live in "big houses." The ability to see both sides of a coin is what will lead to mutual understanding and respect and will the light at the end of the tunnel for the problems of the North East

Tariatang's writing has an undertone of quiet humor, and her style is pleasing in its simplicity.

(x) Short Takes

Two stories stand out in *The Coconut-Cutter and Other Stories* by Anuradha Muralidharan, the title story and “My Mother’s Letter.” In the title story a married woman who falls in love symbolically links her emotions and decisions to the coconut tree in her garden. The latter story is about the grey world of an alcoholic mother and her need to hold on to her daughter. There are nine other stories in the collection.

Amardeep S. Dahiya’s *Four Fingers and Seventeen Nails* appears to have been fashioned during a brain-storming session of screen play writers. All the devices are there: turns and twists, chance, losers roller-coasting into winners and vice versa, materialism versus spirituality, science versus superstition and surprise endings. The final message is that in the end money, lust and power are what matter.

The author D.V.S.R Murty trumpets the themes of stories in the title to his collection, *Glimpses of Life: A Collection of Short Stories*. Parents agonize over the ways of their children. Daily life is full of irony. People may be ordinary, but their suffering is anything but. You know what the consequences of deviousness and hypocrisy can be! The titles tell all. Here is a sampling: “Shock! Shock!” “Where is Justice?” “Money is Sinful” ”Romantic Sivam”

The stories in *If the Earth Should Move and Other Stories* by Deepa Agarwal take us into the world of women oppressed by circumstances, lives restricted by social mores, and dreams unfulfilled. But the women are courageous, some succeed in breaking their shackles but most of them rise above their condition through patience and effort

The Marathoners

Shashi Deshpande who began writing tentatively has become an icon today. Her work is taught in universities; she is the subject of research papers; her stories are being collected in volumes. The subject of her short stories remains the multi-faceted

examination of the lot of women in relation to society and men.

Khushwant Singh published his first collection in the fifties. Fifty years later, in 2005, he brought out *Paradise and Other Stories*. The stories carry his trademark satire with the objects this time being a gullible American, a self-styled astrologer, an atheist, a womanizer and a superstitious man.

Ruskin Bond continues to weave his artless magic with stories of everyday life. Manoj Das collected and brought out 28 stories and a novella under the title of *Selected Fiction* in 2001.

Full Circle

From as early as the third century B.C *The Jataka Tales*, *The Panchatantra*, *Kadambari* and the *Katha Sarita Sagara* travelled to what is now known as the Middle East, and then Europe, where they circulated in different versions. They provided inspiration to writers from Boccaccio and Chaucer in the Middle Ages and to writers like Peele and Greene in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The eighties and nineties saw the revival of this situation but in a slightly different form. Writers of Indian origin in foreign countries straddle different ways of living and are heirs to the in-betweenness of cultures and experiences. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Neela Vaswani, Rana Dasgupta, Sanjay Nigam, Indu Sundersan, Preeta Samarasan, to name a few, bring unique perspectives and thus add new dimensions, shades and nuances to the multi-faceted literary traditions of their adopted countries. Thus the cycle which began in the third century, with Indian stories reaching the far corners of the world, has come full circle, with writers of Indian origin in foreign lands, writing about their adoptive countries.

SECTION VII: THE PROSPECT

If anyone wishes to understand India he must go first, not to its novelists or playwrights, nor to its social scientists, but to its short story writers. India, after all, is a continent, and though the texture of life is the same throughout, the variations are far too subtle to be recorded in a novel. The short story is the ideal medium for this purpose. What is more, the short story has fulfilled expectations. For, as K. Natwar-Singh says, "Perhaps in no other branch of creative or literary activity has the feel of the Indian scene been so ably, so rewardingly, captured."

Unlike the novel, which has dealt with a limited number of themes, the Indian short story in English has covered, as this survey has shown, a wide range of subjects. The backgrounds have been more varied, and an infinitely larger gallery of character and type has been on display in the short story.

The record of Indian life provided by the short story is more authentic than that found in the longer forms. For one thing, a collection of short stories, being more difficult to sell abroad, obliges the Indian short story writer in English to keep Indian, not foreign, readership in mind. His choice of subject and method of treatment is consequently affected by this circumstance. The short story writer has little choice but to address himself to his countrymen. This is no mean achievement on the part of the Indian short story writer in English.

If the quality of the work done so far in the Indian short story in English gives cause for satisfaction, the future holds promise of more. The reason for this optimism is the presence of a number of propitious factors.

There are, in the first place, a large number of "little" magazines. The "little" magazine caters to a select readership, it encourages experiment and it attracts serious contributors. In most cases, prestige is attached to publication in such magazine. In a number of instances, the editors of these magazines are men of letters themselves.

A second factor which augers well for the short story is the increasing importance that publishers are giving to collections of short stories, as a glance at the bibliography will prove. The service rendered by Jaico Pocket Books to the short story in the fifties is being more effectively continued by other publishers.

Another fortunate development has been the birth of online literary magazines. E-zines require less financial investment than hard copy magazines. The range and variety of e-zines is astonishing. Writers who practice different genres, from the realistic to the wildly speculative, have a ready market for their work in e-zines.

Then there is the fact that paperback publishing has come of age in India. The popularity of the paperback is bound to provide the writer with incentive and opportunity. Even publishers specializing in hardbacks occasionally release paperbacks editions. There are other publishers whose focus is the paperback market only.

The timing is right for women writers. On the one hand, more women than ever before are writing short stories, as a glance at Chapter I in Section VI shows. On the other, more independent and autonomous women publishers, are setting up shop. The motivation of these publishers is not commercial; it is to give voice to women-centered issues which the mainstream publishers neglect. To list a few of these publishers, they are Kali, Katha, Stree, Tulika, Tara, Yoda, Karadi, Zubaan, Women Unlimited and Biblio. This combination of factors – of more women writing and publishers devoted to women's issues - is fortuitous

With the increasing size of the reading public, publishing has become a profitable industry. Publishers of all hues and stripes have mushroomed in India. Writers nowadays have choices which were not available to their forbearers. Writers nowadays are greeted with open doors when they approach publishers.

The market has acquired depth as publishers create niches for themselves.

Unisun Publications, for example, has been running a creative writing competition, in collaboration with The British Council, in a number of genres, including the short story, since 2004. The stories of the winners and those selected from among the entrants are published annually in an anthology. This approach is an improvement on the older one where a newspaper or magazine first ran the winners in the media before collecting stories in anthologies. Such anthologies carried stories which readers had gone over before. Unisun's approach brings together unread, unpublished stories.

When an industry matures, ancillary services grow in its shadow. The new millennium has seen the growth of literary agencies in India. A literary agent acts as a support base for writers, evaluating a writer's work, suggesting revision, if necessary, placing it with the right publishers and negotiating a good deal for the writer.

There are Jacaranda, Osian, Khambatta Literary Agency, Red Ink, Siyahi, to mention a few.

To complement the work of the literary agencies, Writer's Side, describing itself as India's "first manuscript assessment service" was started in August 2008. Its appeal lies with debut writers who need professional help with their manuscript. Writer's Side will do most of the filtering for publishers and thus become scouts for them as well as for agents. Roving Writers provides similar services

There was a time when established writers lent their talent, and their reputations, to this form. Today the form sheds luster on the writers. And that leads to another important consideration: more and more writers are turning to the short story as a form of literary expression, thus increasing its popularity. Shiv K. Kumar, the poet, is a case in point.

We find that the subject matter is becoming more varied. We just have to look at the themes of the writers discussed in the last section, "An Extended Spring," to understand the new shades the current crop of writers have added to the peacock-hues

of the Indian short in English.

The sons and daughters of the Seven Sisters in the North East, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, have started writing about the special problems these states face. They have started examining the issues of ethnicity, identity and roots thrown up by insurgency, violence, kidnappings, corruption, and cross border immigration. We can expect the Seven Sisters to introduce new themes to the Indian Short Story in English in the years to come.

What can be done to aid this propitious combination of factors? First and foremost, there is the need for more anthologies of short stories. An anthology has a number of advantages over a collection of short stories by an individual author. From the publisher's point of view, anthologies command better sales than an individual's collection. The reader is assured of greater variety of theme and treatment, besides the satisfaction of knowing that the selection has been made with discrimination. For the writer, more opportunities of publication open up. Anthologies are treated with respect by reviewers and critics.

Anthologies are important for the growth of the short story. Little known writers, whose stories may not be inferior in any way to those of their established counterparts, come to the notice of the public in the company of better known authors in anthologies.

In the hand of discriminating, and practicing, Indian short story writers in English the scope of the anthology is unlimited. Anthologies can be compiled on the basis of certain periods (1925-50, 1950-60, 1960-70 etc.) or on the basis of theme. For the prospective editor we suggest anthologies of Humorous Indian Short Stories in English, Tall Stories, Children Stories, Ghost Stories, Sporting Stories, Mysteries and Thrillers, Speculative Stories and the like.

There is a need for more short story competitions. Newspapers and magazines

come to mind as the best mediums for organizing such competitions. But their influence can be restricting; newspapers and magazines encourage only certain types of stories. Publishers, particularly those of paperbacks, can take the lead of Unisun Publications to organize competitions. This is an easy way to compile good anthologies. And, for the writer, the prospect of having to fight for a place in such an anthology can be incentive enough.

It will be a great service to the Indian short story writer in English if we take a lesson from America. For fifty years, from 1915 till his death in 1950, a young poet, Edward J.O 'Brien presented annually "the most distinguished short fiction appearing in periodicals of this country, "under the title Best American Short Stories. The series continues to this day.

The American example can be followed in India with profit. The impetus such a venture will give the Indian short story writer in English will be immeasurable.

In India the short story, indeed all forms of writing, suffer from the absence of literary prizes. Till recently, the solitary exception was the annual award by the Sahitya Akademi. Very often no work in English is deemed meritorious enough for this award. A collection of short stories has yet to win this award. India has no Pulitzer prizes, as in the U.S.A., or the W.H. Smith award, as in England. A writer does not live by bread alone; a pat on the back keeps him going. Magazines, literary organizations, above all, the bigger publishers can institute annual prizes and make them prestigious by inviting eminent writers to join the selection committee. The prize need not take the form of cash, and may consist only of a citation.

Two small steps to correct this situation have been taken. Since 1998, a book chain has sponsored Vodafone Crossword Book Award. In January 2008, Indiaplaza, an online bookstore, initiated the Indiaplaza Golden Book Awards, as an annual event. The Indiaplaza concept is an interesting one. Publishers nominate books published in

the previous year. While a panel of judges chooses the winner, readers nominate the winner of a special category called the Reader's Choice Award through an online voting system. While it is hoped that a collection of short stories will win these two awards at some future date, it is also hoped that both these sponsors will consider introducing prizes for short story collections as a separate category.

The Indian short story in English has attracted, and continues to attract, writers of talent. This vast country and the Indian way of life offer the short story writer a wealth of material. More opportunities than ever before are opening up to these writers. A little help from the custodians of culture can go a long way to further enrich the genre, achievement in which so far, under difficult conditions, has been, as this survey has shown, a matter of great satisfaction.

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A Few Extracts from Comments by Critics

“All things considered, then, the chief attraction of Melwani’s work remains the portfolio of writers and their short stories that his collection complies. This aspect of the collection is both wide-ranging and painstaking, brining to notice, among others, several obscure, forgotten or little-known works. In the process, it does enough to spotlight the short story genre as an extant and expanding archive deserving serious research. Ultimately, it is for this, that his bookwin recommendation.

Melwani’s distinction is clearing a trail on a road less travelled in Indian literary studies.- *Wasafiri*, *The Magazine of Contemporary Writing*, London. Vol.24, No2 June 2009

“The book is absorbing and well-researched. It is a convincing, lively narrative history of the short story that still remains a developing literary form. We need more — and yet more — of such narrative histories that can discuss changes in artistic trends, materials, techniques, et al. The scope for the Indian short story is indeed boundless” - M.S.Nagarajan in *The Hindu*, Feb 9, 2010

“One agrees with this author when he says, more women are writing short stories now, than at any other time. He features a great many of them. This study of women writers provides useful guidance to further reading.- Neeta Sen Samarth *The Statesman*, Kolkata.

“The language in which such analysis is presented is anything but bookish. Melwani has an easy, conversational style, which draws the reader into the narration.” – *Bharat Ratna*, Hong Kong.

“This book is a great introduction to a genre of writing which is largely ignored.”-*The Indian*, Hong Kong

“The bibliography is a treasure trove for the research scholar” *Taipei Times*, Taiwan

“Melwani’s book is happily free from the fashionable, trendy, stodgy, Western critical jargon and may be enjoyed by the academic scholar as well as by the common reader alike.” *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, July 2010 issue

Reviews and interviews from critics

THE HINDU

A History Survey of the Indian Short Story

Review by M.S.Nagarajan

Aesop's Fables, Ovid's Metamorphosis, Boccaccio's The Decameron and the Indian Jataka tales, the Panchatantra, Somadeva's Katha-sarit-sagara are among the forerunners of the short story. The advent of its present form can be traced to the early 19th century and of its parent, the novel, to the 18th century. The brevity of its narrative, single action, and thematic focus naturally met with a worldwide reception and thus short fiction matured into an artistic genre, casting its net across the world. Murli Das Melwani's book makes a historical survey right from the beginning to the present-day. Such a wide-ranging critical survey has hitherto not been attempted. He raises two weighty questions that merit our attention. First, has the Indian short story writer contributed anything of value to it? and second, has his work made the form more flexible, as say, Hemingway's or Chekov's did? Melwani subjects all short-story writers — 66 in all — from 1835 to 2008 to a close scrutiny. The stories are not discussed individually, though some specimens are close-read and locally analysed. But a writer's entire collection is examined and evaluated, with conclusions drawn at the end.

Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, who represent the first flowering (1935-45) of this genre, responded to the nationalist movement, each in his own way — Mulk Raj Anand, the social activist, presenting a true vision of Indian life; R.K. Narayan, with his perception of the average as positive, exploring the nature of life and reality; and Raja Rao experimenting with form. The second flowering (1960-70) looked for answers to the question often raised in academic circles: can the Indian sensibility be expressed in English? Ruth

Prawar Jabwalla's "detached involvement with the Indian situation," and Bhabani Bhattacharya's professionalism and the easy readability of his stories supply some answers to that question. The 1970s more than fulfil the expectations of the '60s. The decade is marked by an endless variety in the handling of themes and variations, coupled with varying modes and techniques of narration influenced by Russian and American short fiction.

Galaxy of writers

We have a galaxy of writers — Keki Daruwalla, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi, Kamala Das and a host of others — participating in the ongoing process of openness in form, reliable and unreliable narration with multiple points of view, and shifting focalization. The period between 1980 and 2008 reflects, in the words of Melwani, a "burgeoning creativity." There are more women writers now than at any time in the past. Altering perspectives in man-woman relationships, alienation in modern life, and the impact of feminism and feminist theories on the academia have supplied meat and juice to a potential creative writer. As readership expanded across the world, Indian stories tended to get translated into foreign languages. The author is quite right in his assessment that the short story has covered a wider range of subjects with a larger gallery of characters and that the record of Indian life is more authentic in this genre than in the novel. The 'little' magazine that is most selective in choosing the material for publication — getting a story published in it is considered highly prestigious — has done much to improve the quality of this genre. Paperback print editions and online literary magazines too have helped a great deal in popularizing this form. He suggests that instituting literary prizes and bringing out a collection of the best short stories every year will encourage new talent.

Melwani adroitly integrates his critical comments on the works with the short introductory remarks of each section on the evolving political and social mores of the times.

On the whole, the book is absorbing and well-researched. It is a convincing, lively narrative history of the short story that still remains a developing literary form. We need more — and yet more — of such narrative histories that can discuss changes in artistic trends, materials, techniques, et al. The scope for the Indian short story is indeed boundless.

The Hindu newspaper, February 9, 2010.

Published in India.

<https://www.thehindu.com/books/Historical-survey-of-Indian-short-story/article16813374.ece>

WASAFIRI

THE MAGAZINE OF INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY WRITING, LONDON

“All things considered, then, the chief attraction of Melwani’s work remains the portfolio of writers and their short stories that his collection complies. This aspect of the collection is both wide-ranging and painstaking, bringing to notice, among others, several obscure, forgotten or little-known works. In the process, it does enough to spotlight the short story genre as an extant and expanding archive deserving serious research. Ultimately, it is for this, that his book win recommendation.

Where Melwani’s distinction is clearing a trail on a road less travelled in Indian literary studies, the challenge for *Nation in Imagination* is quite the opposite.

Wasafiri, Vol.24, No2 June 2009.

Published in England.

THE JOURNAL OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Reviewed by Basavaraj Naikar

Professor & Chairman, Department of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad 580 003

Critical works on Indian Short stories are very rare, although the genre of short story is practiced by a large number of writers. Murli Melwani has done a great service to the academic world by offering his valuable historical and critical survey of the Indian short story from the earliest writer, K.C.Dutt (1835) to the latest one, Nikika Laloo Tariang. Though the genre of short story is neglected as if it is a step-child of literature, it provides a wealth of diversified material to the researcher, who is sophisticated in his approach. As Melwani rightly suggests, the vision of short fiction is diversified, mosaic, piecemeal and kaleidoscopic. Hence it offers a challenge to the researcher, if not to a common reader, to discern the hidden patterns of thought, behaviour and culture. Far from parroting the Western critical concepts, Melwani rightly goes to the Indian roots of the genre like the Jataka Tales and Kathasaritsagara and juxtaposes them with the Western masters like Maupassant, Chekhov and others. After offering a perceptive introduction to the theory of short story from a global perspective, he traces the growth of it by briefly discussing all the major Indian short story writers of different decades.

The chapter on the beginnings of the Indian short story during 1835-1935 is very valuable as it offers information on writers like Cornelia Sorabji, S. B.Bannerjea, A.S.P. Ayyar and Shankar Ram, who are not sufficiently known to modern scholars. The first flowering of the short story writers (1935-1945) is attributable to the celebrities like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Manjeri Iswaran. The following chapters introduce the other short story writers, who are not easily visible in critical works, like Leslie Noronha, Nargis Dalal, Rishi Reddy and others. He has covered the works of writers published up to 2007. He must be congratulated for giving a legitimate place for these writers in the history of Indian English short fiction. But

the present reviewer is surprised to notice that his own two short story collections like *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories* (1999, 2008, short listed for the Commonwealth Fiction Prize for the Best First Book from Eurasia in 2000), and *The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories* (2001) are conspicuously missing from Melwani's otherwise excellent survey.

The greatness of Melwani's survey is to be found in the fact that he has given the award of recognition to almost all the Indian English writers of short fiction; that he has made very insightful and candid remarks about the general qualities of each short story writer and particular features of important short stories of the same writer; and that he comments on the major concerns of each decade seen in the stories of the writers of that decade. On the whole, Melwani has shown how the short story has moved from fantasy to realism, from the supernatural to the social and from the religious to the secular and psychological dimension. He rightly pays homage to the little magazines and small publishers, who have nourished the genre of short story in India to a great extent. Similarly he deplores the absence of attractive literary awards and prizes in India exclusively meant for Indian English writers, especially short story writers.

Melwani's book is happily free from the fashionable, trendy, stodgy, Western critical jargon and may be enjoyed by the academic scholar as well as by the common reader alike. He deserves our heart-felt congratulations for his hard won insights, which are a product of life-long dedication and cogitation and not of the hasty conclusions of a Ph.D. scholar. The book provides abundant material and direction to the M. Phil and Ph.D. scholars, who will be eagerly looking for fresh topics for fruitful research. One hopes that Melwani keeps on revising and updating his valuable book every year.

The Journal of Indian Writing in English, July 2010 issue.

Published in India.

THE STATESMAN

Documenting the Short Story

Reviewed by Neeta Sen Samarth

As the name suggests, the book under review is about short stories written in English by Indian authors. Murli Melwani has traced the growth of the short story in its historical and cultural context. He feels this genre has been treated as a side activity by novelists and hence neglected by critics. Melwani examines how much of the traditional story telling is preserved and how much of the form, refined in the West, has been accepted. According to him, this genre enjoys a few advantages over the novel.

The intellectual, isolated from the life of the masses, can record his isolation and unrelatedness better. A view, that may not be shared by others. While documenting the short story from early beginnings to post-modern times, Melwani's treatise features writers, inconsequential to the ordinary reader, but, who perhaps could throw some light on anecdotes of Indian life for students of literature and sociology. Thus, apart from a few others, Cornelia Sorabjee's *The Love and Life behind the Purdah* finds a place in the early section.

Translated stories have been excluded, so Tagore's work doesn't feature here, but Melwani pays obeisance to him, admitting his influence on Indian writers to be all-pervasive'. The freedom struggle, Gandhi and Gandhian way of life, fables, beliefs, the middle class, the rich and the poor, the Bengal famine form the backdrop for the stories, so, Melwani is perhaps right when he says this genre shows India in all its entirety.

The founders, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao are dealt with in some detail. He is frank in appreciating as well as disapproving. He condemns Anand's verbosity and pompous diction. Of adapting English to express vernacular idioms, he says, it is a successful means of conveying the flavour of regional speech when used moderately. R.K. Narayan's

repeating situations and characters in different combinations, irksome to some, is appreciated by Melwani. He also praises Narayan for remaining detached in all his stories. Raja Rao's experiments with form interest him. Numerous writers, both men and women from the South, whom one doesn't normally encounter, are covered by Melwani.

One agrees with this author when he says, more women are writing short stories now, than at any other time. He features a great many of them. Ruth Prawar Jhabavala, Attia Hossain, Ela Sen, Padma Hejmadi, Kamala Das, Sujatha Bala Subramanian, Raji Narisimhan, Juliette Banerjee, Nergis Dalal, Susan Viswanathan, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Anita Desai and a host of others are presented by Melwani. He shows us how these writers brought renewed life and extended subject matter to the Indian English story. Their work is of a remarkable standard and variety, and they contribute to the modern consciousness, both Indian experience of a changing social structure and the pattern of daily living. Both exotic and common place. This study of women writers provides a useful guidance to further reading.

Melwani is among those very few who realize the importance of anthologies. This is the only way little known writers, whose stories may not be inferior in any way to that of their better known counter parts, can draw the attention of readers. Along with popular writers, lesser known, too, find a place in this treatise which is in keeping with the true spirit of a historical survey. Writers of Indian origin who live abroad are mentioned in passing, for this book deals only with Indian writers of this subcontinent, both living and dead. In the closing chapters of this book, Melwani seems to be in a mighty hurry.

The Stateman, June 8, 2008.

Published in India.

BR INTERNATIONAL

Reviewed by Amar Vaswani, Atlanta, USA

Themes in the Indian Short Story in English: An Historical and a Critical Survey, 1835-2008 is a critical and historical survey of the Indian short story in English. As a genre the short story has generally been neglected by Indian writers, publishers and critics. Murli Melwani makes an unconventional claim in his book and follows it up with very cogent arguments. He claims that the short story form is more flexible than the longer form of the novel and therefore capable of reflecting a broader spectrum of Indian experience than the novel. Considering that India is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, I find merit in that argument, especially at a time when India is emerging as a powerful player on the world stage. With greater interaction between Indians and foreigners, the area of experience is bound to widen, thus providing newer themes for writers. The plasticity of the short story form will be able to capture and convey the new experiences.

I find Melwani's approach to his subject matter in this book refreshing. He does not merely study individual stories or writers. He studies the short stories of well-known as well as lesser known writers against the political, social and cultural background of the times. He examines how the political, social and cultural events influence particular writers and how the contemporary events are reflected in the writers' work.

The foregoing sentence may give the impression that this book is a social tract. It is not, because the main focus in the book is the literary quality of a particular short story writer's work. Melwani studies a writer's approach to characterization, atmosphere, theme, dialogue and style in the context of the larger events.

The first short story in English was written in 1835, shortly after Lord Macaulay's bill introduced English as the medium of instruction in India. The book divides the era from 1835

to the present day into different periods: 1835-1935, 1935-1950, 50-60, 60-70, 1980-2008. The author uses this method of classification to blend a historical survey with a critical study.

Between 1835 and 1935, the writers proudly documented the customs and traditions of Indian life. These writers prepared the way for the giants who between 1935 and 1950 corrected the impression of India and its inhabitants created by the colonial writers and portrayed India as it really is.

The emphasis shifted in the fifties to other subjects with satire being the predominant approach. In the sixties, seventies and eighties the themes expanded exponentially and every aspect of Indian life and nuance of experience provided themes for the short stories.

The language in which such analysis is presented is anything but bookish. Melwani has an easy, conversational style, which draws the reader into the narration.

Murli Melwani writes in the Preface, "Reading the stories I have discussed in my book gave me hours of pleasure. If my book can convince the reader to turn to the stories themselves, my pleasure would be increased manifold. Themes in the Indian Short Story in English: An Historical and a Critical Survey, 1835-1980 is a virtual story-tasting fest. The fest will whet the palates of a legion of readers; there is no reason why Murli Melwani's "pleasure" should not" be increased manifold."

BR International, March 2008 issue.

Published in Hong Kong

THE INDIAN

Murli Melwani, in his book, *Themes in the Indian Short Story in English: An Historical and a Critical Survey, 1835-2008*, reverses some commonly held perceptions about the Indian short story in English.

The Indian novel in English has long been held as the preeminent mirror to Indian life. Fine, Melwani says, that is true so far as certain broad themes, like the colonial experience, the place of faith in Indian life and two or three others, are concerned. What about the nuances of everyday living, the little dramas that are enacted in the privacy of our thoughts and relationships, especially since Indians are expected to, outwardly, conform to certain norms and patterns of behavior. Indians basically enjoy inner freedom; to think, feel and act as we like in the privacy of our lives. Only the short story, with its brevity, its concentration and sensitiveness, can capture these moments. The short story form thus has dealt with a wider area of experience than the novel.

By the time Murli Melwani has finished surveying the themes, the backgrounds, the characters and approaches of the dozens of writers who practiced this form between 1835 to the present day, the reader, certainly the present reviewer, accepts this truth.

Indian English Stories is the first comprehensive study of the Indian short story in English, from both a historical and critical perspective. Melwani's approach to the study of the short story form differs from the conventional one. The usual approach is to discuss a few individual stories of a particular author. What Melwani does is to take the whole body of an author's work and look for patterns in it. If he finds one, he points it out; if not, he does not impose one.

The author, to use a cliché, begins at the beginning. He starts with the first ever story written in English by an Indian, way back in 1835. He comments briefly on the work of most

of the writers who wrote for the next 100 years. Most of the writers of that period wanted to show off India, documentary-style, to their Western readers.

The big names came in the 1930s - Mulk Raj Anand with his social concern, R.K. Narayan discovering comedy in the round of daily life, and Raja Rao with his experiments with language and form.

In the fifties Khushwant Singh made his appearance; his stamina remains undiminished today. His contemporary, Attia Hosain, captured the poignancy of Partition in finely chiseled stories.

The sixties boast of writers like Ruth Jhabvala, Bunny Reuben, Ruskin Bond(prolific even now) and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

In the seventies there was a sudden burst of creativity. Authors like Anita Desai, Keki Daruwalla, Padma Hejmadi, Kamala Das, Manohar Malgonkar, Shahsi Despande and others explored new themes.

The young writers of today have continued this trend. Prominent among them are Vikram Chandra, Nisha Da Cunha, Lavanya Sankaran, Shree Ghagate, Githa Hariharan, Anjana Appachana, Meher Pestonji, and Susan Visvnathan, to mention a few among a talented gallery.

Melwani's manner of writing is easy and informal, conversational almost. His approach differs from author to author. He allows the stories to make their impact on him; he records the impressions these made on him. This is in contrast to the conventional practice of judging a story with certain established literary principles

Themes in the Indian Short Story in English: An Historical and a Critical Survey, 1835-2008 is a great introduction to a genre of writing which is largely ignored. Murli Melwani's enthusiasm for its practitioners is bound to be infectious. It has certainly led this reviewer to

make a resolution: to certainly read the authors discussed in the book. I believe it will affect other readers in a similar manner.

The Indian, September 2009 issue.

Published in Hong Kong.

MUSE INDIA

Review by By Shaleen Kumar Singh

Though we have seen in past few years innumerable books of criticism on Indian English Poetry and Fiction being published, there has remained a dearth of books of criticism on short fiction. Murli Melwani's critical and historical survey of Indian English stories, covering a broad spectrum from colonial beginning to Post-modern times, addresses this dearth. Indeed it is the first comprehensive study of this genre. India has been the land of stories.

The Jataka Tales and the *Panchatantra* Stories continue to be read even today. The *Katha Sarita Sagara*, the largest collections of stories in the world, has been the inspiration for the Arabian Nights and others tales which traveled to Europe via the Middle East.

In the beginning the writers proudly documented the customs and traditions of Indian life. Between 1835 and 1935 we have a succession of writers with this aim. Cornelia Sorabji, Dhan Gopal Mukherjee, A.S. Panchpakesha Ayyar, Shankar Ram, among others, prepared the way for the giants who wrote between 1935 and 1950.

Among the giants, Mulk Raj Anand corrected the impression of India and its inhabitants created by Kipling and other Western writers. R.K. Narayan highlighted the drama of everyday life. Raja Rao incorporated elements of Indian folk tales in his stories.

In the fifties, Khushwant Singh observed Indian life with a satirical eye and Attia Hosain conveyed the horrors of Partition in restrained prose.

In the sixties, Ruth Jhabvala captured the foibles of Indians with a foreigner's objectivity. Bunny Reuben introduced cinematic techniques to the short story. Ruskin Bond found moving moments in common lives. Bhabani Bhattacharya captured exotic aspects of Indian life.

In the Seventies Anita Desai brought the intensity of her novels to her stories. Keki Daruwalla set his stories in unusual locales. Padma Hejmadi wrote about life in South India. Jug Suraiya and Vivek Adarkar were the voices of youth at the time. Arun Joshi wrote parables of Indian life. The subject of Manohar Malgonkar's stories was the army. Kamala Das brought the sensitivity of her poetry to her stories. Shashi Deshpande dealt with the questions of a woman's lot and place in Indian society.

The writers who came in the eighties, and continue to write today, have branched out into newer territory. Life in the city - Bombay in the case of Vikram Chandra, Bangalore in that of Lavanya Sankaran, Calcutta in the case of Amit Chaudhuri - is very much the subject of scrutiny. Nisha Da Cunha writes about the states of women's minds. Shree Ghatage examines the demands of tradition, family obligations and personal freedom on an individual. Gay life is the subject of R. Raja Rao's stories. The exploration of new areas of India and the heart goes on in the stories of Githa Haiharan, Anita Nair, Sangeeta Wadhwani, Anjana Appachana, Meher Pestonji, Susan Visvanathan, and others.

Melwani is optimistic about the future of Indian English short stories. The richness of ideas and themes will provide more and more opportunities for story writers to pen stories of significance, beauty and power. Melwani's book is a seminal work which will, in future, guide the critics to give the short story the same respect and study as they do to Indian English Poetry and Fiction.

Muse India, Issue # 20, July 2008.

INDIAN BOOK REVIEWS

A short story is a collaboration between a writer and a reader.

Interview by Shana Susan Ninan

Murli Melwani is the perceptive author of *Themes In The Indian Short Story In English: An Historical And A Critical Survey 1835-2008*. Below is an email interview of his. Keen and crisp observations mark his answers. His remarks are insightful.

SSN: Besides Indian short stories in English being under-projected, what were your reasons to do a critical survey of the same?

MM: The reasons are both literary and personal. First, the literary. Look at all the cultures and sub-cultures we have in this huge country. You need flexible literary forms to convey the essence of these patterns of life. After poetry, the short story is the most flexible of literary forms. A short story can be anything the writer makes it. Something as fragile as Liam O’Flaherty’s sketch of the first flight of a black bird to something as heavily carpentered as Somerset Maugham’s plotted stories of atmosphere, interplay of motive and incisive characterisation. Conveying an unusual or a particular ethnic experience is best done by writing, to use Jane Austen’s phrase, on a “little bit – two inches wide –of ivory”. The short story is that two inches of ivory.

Also, collections of short stories have a tendency to disappear as easily from public memory as they do from library shelves. People are talking about Madhusree Mukherjee’s* portrayal of the Great Bengal Famine, but who remembers Ela Sen’s collection of short stories today?**. The famine occurred in 1943. Ela Sen’s book came out in 1944. Ela Sen’s portrayal is so very authentic. Almost as if she was walking among the starving skeletal figures.

The personal. I made a career change: from a college teacher in India to an exporter in Taiwan. In those days Taipei had only one English book store. Most of the books were on English as a second language! The conversation by and large centered round business charts, figures, targets. I needed to give myself an intellectual lifeline. H.E. Bates's *The Modern Short Story* came to my rescue. This book gives us the author's personal assessment of a number of great short story writers in England, Ireland, America and Russia. This book was my inspiration for a long-term project. I love short stories. I found there was very little critical work on Indian short stories in English. I asked myself, why not pioneer an historical and a critical survey? I got over collections of short stories from India. Made notes for the twenty five years I lived in Taiwan. I put the notes together when I moved to the U.S. The book came out in late 2009.

SSN: What gives short stories their richness? As in, when compared to other forms of writing.

MM: A number of qualities. Suggestiveness, for one. Brevity, for another. Compression, for a third. A short story is really a collaboration between a writer and a reader. The words are the code. The pages are the transmitter. The reader's imagination is the transistor that receives the waves and reconstructs a whole. It is this elasticity of the short story that makes it such a great form.

SSN: Having been a short story writer yourself, was it easier to critically survey such a topic?

MM: Definitely. I could see how the short story writer was trying to create a character. Assume the author's aim was to bring alive a character by means of her gestures: at one point he could show her smoothening back her hair with a casual brush of the palm; at another, using her hands to make a point. A skillful writer can suggest the atmosphere of a rainy day by

indicating the dampness that permeated the walls. The point is I could read the writer's intentions.

SSN: What was the inspiration for the cover of your book?

MM: When my publisher asked me what I'd like to emphasize on the cover, I told him to try to depict the traditional and the modern existing side by side. The co-existence of tradition and change are a fact of Indian life. How can short stories writers not tacitly or implicitly acknowledge them? The publisher's artist did the rest.

SSN: What is the reception of Indian short stories in English abroad, not just the countries with a large Indian population?

MM: To be honest, collections of short stories sell less than novels. The American universities that offer Asian studies carry them. Mostly stories are eye openers for Americans. "There's hardly anything about caste in this book." This from a review of Vikram Chandra's *Love and Longing in Bombay*. I would not know the situation in other countries.

SSN: Internet, social networking sites and 'little' publishers have given a renewed impetus to short stories. Do you think this'll inspire up and coming writers?

MM: Without doubt. Just pull up e-zine sites. Look at these two online magazines Zoetrope and Narrative. In 2008, Penguin India brought a selection *Blogprint: The Winners of the Sulekha.com-Penguin Online Writing Contest*. I believe www.sulekha.com received over a thousand entries for the contest.

SSN: Qualities that a short story writer should possess.

MM: A very difficult question. I'll try to answer it, anyway. He should compress language. He should suggest, rather than pencil in, character. He should hint at, rather than

paint the setting. The theme should be self-evident, rather than stated. Raymond Carver's stories are good models of a short story writer's craft.

SSN: Any existing short story you think you should've written and why.

MM: I wish I could have written Padma Hejmadi's *The Uncles and the Mahatma*. It's a gem of a story. Why? Because it has richness of theme, a touch of comedy, finely etched characters, a deep understanding of Indian tradition.

SSN: Anything else you'd like to comment on.

MM: Two comments, if you will allow me. One, Women writers in India continue to amaze me with their unusual perspectives and experiences. A recent example: the stories by women in Shinie Antony's anthology, *Why We Don't Talk*. Two, I am pleased at the growth in the number of publishers in India in the last few years. This means more openings for writers.

Note: * in her book *Churchill's Secret War* Tranquebar

***Darkening Days*. Sushil Gupta & Co

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Murli Melwani is the author of 4 collections of short stories: *Stories of a Salesman* (Writers Workshop 1967 2nd edition 1979,). *Ladders Against the Sky*. (Kaziranga Books. 2017) *Under the Indian Umbrella: a Collage of Short Stories* (LiFi Publications, 2018) *Beyond the Rainbow* (Black-and-White Fountain, 2020), *A Play in Three Acts*, *Deep Roots*. (Writers Workshop, 1970), 2 books of literary criticism, *Themes in Indo-Anglian Literature* (Prakash Book Depot. 1977), *Themes in the Indian Short Story in English: An Historical and a Critical Survey 1835-2008* (Prakash Book Depot. 2008). He runs an archival database for collections of short stories written Indians in English: <http://indianshortstoryinenglish.com/>.

Murli Melwani and his wife, Mona, live in Foster City U.S.A.

